THE SEGA MASTER SYSTEM ENCYCLOPEDIA

DEREK SLATON

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Intro from the Author

Welcome to the Sega Master System Encyclopedia. Within these pages you will find in depth reviews of Master System Games, numerous screen shots, as well as gameplay videos.
I have a profound fondness for the early days of gaming since that was the era that shaped my childhood. Sadly as time has gone by the vast majority of these games have been lost to the ages, destined to forever be packed away in boxes resting at the back of the closet. This is the main reason why I began this project.

My goal with this is to create the definitive publication on the Sega Master System, and to make sure that the memory of these games lives on for future gaming generations. Granted not all of the games within these pages deserves to be remembered fondly, but they do deserve to be remembered nonetheless.

The reviews are equal parts informative and entertaining. While the purpose of encyclopedias isn't to be entertaining, the purpose of gaming is. Given that playing games is incredibly fun I believed that reading about them should also be.

A brief note on the reviews, I don't assign any sort of score. There are a multitude of reasons for this, but the biggest one is that we all like different types of games and my opinion probably won't match up with yours. That said, I do offer recommendations and give you specific reasons as to why you should give the game a shot (even if it's just to experience just how bad the game is).

If you grew up with these games I hope that you enjoy the walk down memory lane and remember some of the gems from years gone by. If you are a younger gamer and this is your first venture into the classics I hope that you learn a lot, and I sincerely hope that you give some of these games a shot.

Please feel free to share your thoughts with me at VgaTV@yahoo.com or via my website www.TheVgaTV.com on on my Facebook page www.facebook.com/VgaTV

Game List

Action Fighter
Aerial Assault
Afterburner
Alex Kidd in High Tech World
Alex Kidd The Lost Stars
Alex Kidd in Miracle World
Alex Kidd in Shinobi World
Alf
Alien Syndrome
Altered Beast
Astro Warrior
Aztec Adventure
Black Belt
Blade Eagle 3-D
Bomber Raid
California Games
Captain Silver
Casino Games
Castle of Illusion
Choplifter
Cloud Master
Columns
Cyborg Hunter
Dead Angle
Dick Tracy
Double Dragon
Enduro Racer
E-Swat
F-16 Fighting Falcon
Fantasy Zone
Fantasy Zone 2
Fantasy Zone 3
Galaxy Force
Gangster Town
Ghost House
Ghostbusters
Ghouls and Ghosts
Global Defense
Golden Axe
Golden Axe Warrior
Golvellius
Great Baseball
Great Basketball
Great Football
Great Golf
Great Hockey
Great Soccer
Great Volleyball
Hang-On/Safari Hunt
James Buster Douglas Boxing
Joe Montana Football
Kenseiden
King’s Quest
Lord of the Sword
Marksman Shooting
Maze Hunter 3-D
Michael Jackson Moonwalker
Miracle Warriors
Missile Defense 3-D
Monopoly
Montezuma’s Revenge
My Hero
The Ninja
Outrun
Paperboy
Parlor Games

Game List

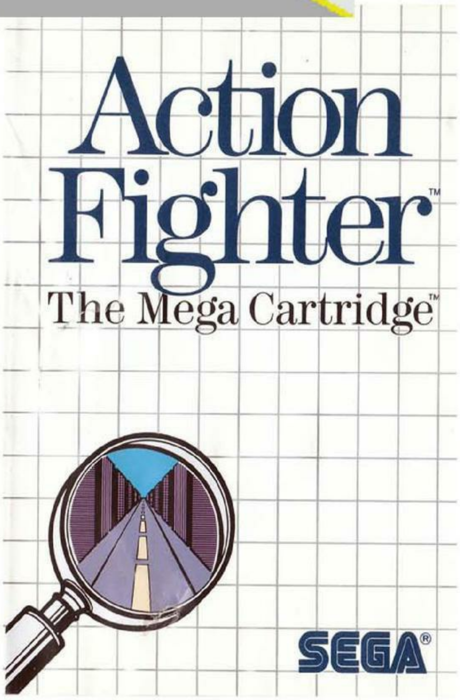
- Penguin Land
- Phantasy Star
- Posiden Wars
- Power Strike
- Pro Wrestling
- Psycho Fox
- Quartet
- R-Type
- Rambo 2
- Rambo 3
- Rampage
- Rastan
- RC Grand Prix
- Reggie Jackson Baseball
- Rescue Mission
- Rocky
- Shanghai
- Shinobi
- Shooting Gallery
- Slap Shot
- Sonic the Hedgehog
- Space Harrier
- Space Harrier 3-D
- Spellcaster
- Spiderman
- Spy vs Spy
- Strider
- Super Monaco GP
- Super Tennis
- Teddy Boy
- Thunder Blade
- Time Soldiers
- Transbot
- Vigilante
- Walter Payton Football
- Wanted
- Where is Carmen Sandiedo
- Wonder Boy
- Wonder Boy 3 Dragons Trap
- Wonder Boy in Monster Land
- World Grand Prix
- Y's
- Zaxxon
- Zillion
- Zillion 2

ACTION FIGHTER

Release Date: 1986
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Driving
Players: 1 - 2

ACTION
FIGHTER
AF

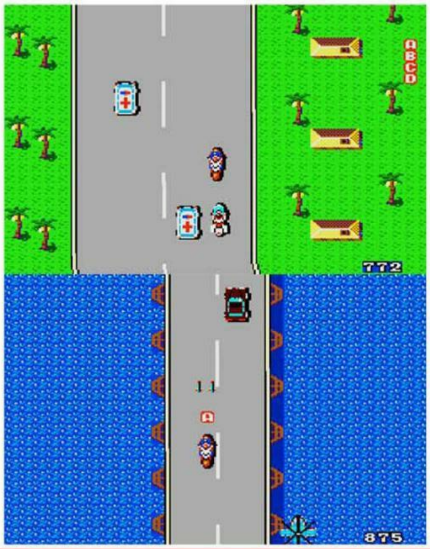

Action
Fighter™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

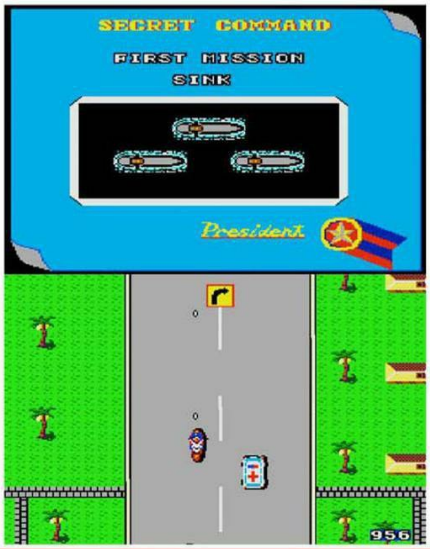
Action Fighter is Sega's answer to the arcade classic Spy Hunter.

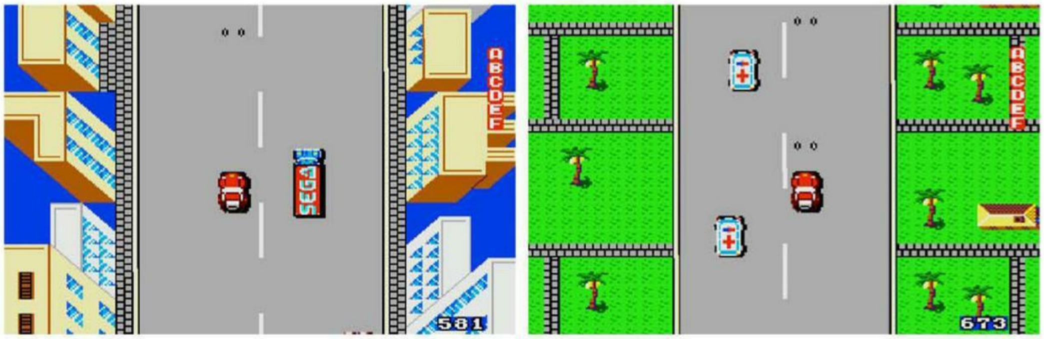
The game does manage to do an admiral job of evoking the memory of the much more popular title, as well as adding in a few original wrinkles in an attempt to make it qualify as "original". That said, it still falls way short of the goal.

Once you hit start you are given your mission objective direct from the president. Now I'm not sure why the president is taking time out of his busy schedule to personally send you on a suicide mission to blow up various objects, but hey, let's roll with it. Your first mission is to go deep behind enemy lines and destroy a trio of battleships that are floating in the harbor. So naturally you hop on your motorcycle for a one man frontal assault. (Yeah it's safe to say that whoever came up with this plan was quite possibly a taco short of a combo plate).

Now if this were Spy Hunter your motorcycle would be tricked out with every weapon imaginable, here however your motorcycle has a single shot pea shooter and, well, not much else. Seriously, they couldn't even spring for a machine gun. To make things worse if you bump into anything you explode, which wouldn't be too bad if you could actually outrun the enemy. Sadly your bosses are apparently concerned with speeding, so your bike has what appears to be a top speed of about 45 MPH. This just happens to be the magic speed that is both slow enough to let the enemy catch up with you while simultaneously being just fast enough to make it virtually impossible to avoid any obstacle that pops up in the road. Thankfully there is a lengthy timer instead of a lives counter for this part of the game, so you are free to crash as many times as you like (and crash you will).







Luckily the motorcycle portion of the level is very short lived. Every time you are able to blow up an enemy vehicle it triggers the release of a letter from the top of the screen. After you collect A-D your motorcycle transforms into a car. Well, it doesn't really transform, instead half a dozen metal parts fly in from all angles and fuses to your motorcycle making the change. It's never explained why, if your country posses this kind of precision technology that allows metal objects to hit a moving target and fuse together, you would be sent on a suicide mission rather than simply fusing bombs to the hulls of the ships you are being sent to destroy. Anyway, now that you have your car it's time to do some real damage.

The car packs a little more punch than the motorcycle. You can not only ram cars into barriers, but you also have a more powerful gun that allows you to mow through enemy after enemy. This sounds more fun that it actually is thanks to the fact that there are a grand total of 4 different vehicles on the road, one of which is an ally. In addition to the standard motorcycle and car you also have to destroy endless stream of ambulances. Seriously, how devoted are you to killing your enemies when you turn their cars into a flaming pile of twisted metal, only to blow up the ambulance carrying their charred remains to the hospital?

Just like in Spy Hunter you occasionally get the opportunity to power up your vehicle by pulling into a non-descript van that shows up on the highway. Well, in Spy Hunter it's non-descript, here there is a giant SEGA logo plastered on the van. This brings up two questions.

1. Why, if you are on a secret mission behind enemy lines, did somebody think it was wise to advertise who is doing the assault?

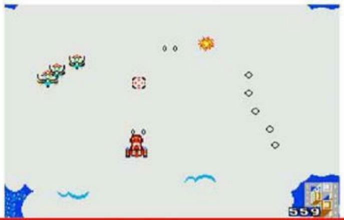
2. Why is Sega funding a covert operation to destroy military equipment in a rival nation?

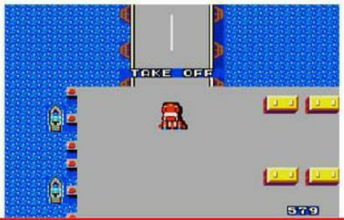
Unlike Spy Hunter however you don't get cool weapons like oil slicks and smokescreens, instead you get a small upgrade to your gun which goes away as soon as you crash, which means you get extra firepower for about six seconds. Unless you get really, really good at the game you are going to be better off just driving past them since saving as much time on the clock is more important than the brief access to added weaponry.

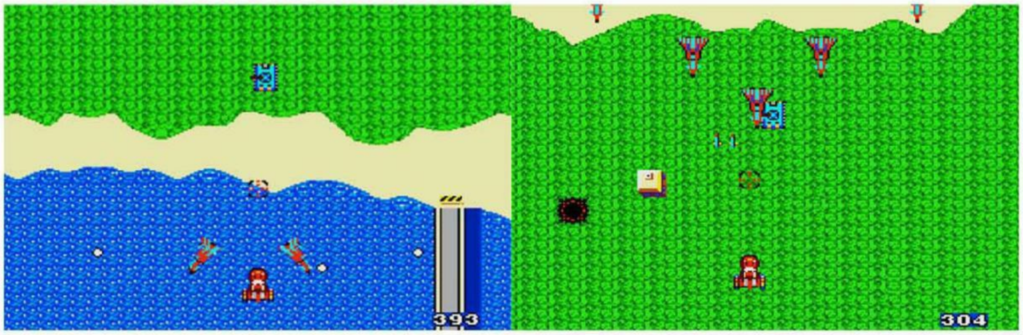
Speaking of brief, your time in the car is going to be over pretty much as soon as it starts since you only need to collect three more letters before your next upgrade. As you reach the end of the road your car freezes in time as two jet engines attach themselves to the rear spoiler and sends you up into the heavens for the final part of the level. And yes, apparently during that brief pause to attach the jet engines you had enough time to rewrite the laws of physics.

The flying portion of the game is the only place where Action Fighter stands apart from Spy Hunter, and it's also the place where the difficulty ramps up dramatically. Unlike the driving sections where the biggest danger was an ambulance bumping you off a bridge, the flying segments has death coming at you from every conceivable angle. There are packs of alien ships that dart across the screen, jet fighters that not only try to shoot you but also try to turn themselves into kamikaze pilots, as well as attack choppers that will hover right in front of you just long enough to mock you before gunning you down. If that wasn't enough you also have to contend with ground forces like tanks and gunships shooting at you from below.

As you fly you'll notice that you have a set of crosshairs just in front of your jet car. This is your ground targeting system, and it gives you just enough of a reach to be able to take out the ground based enemy that just blew you out of the sky. Seriously, in all the time I've played this I think I have successfully destroyed a tank and escaped unharmed a grand total of three times. So while it was a nice thought to have ground based attacks, the execution of it leaves a lot to be desired. I'm not going to go as far to say that it's totally broken, but given that the ground forces seem to have trouble shooting diagonally it makes much more sense to simply avoid the enemy rather than engage them.







Actually, given that the air forces often take multiple hits it is in your best interest to employ a strategy of non-engagement and simply fly around them (which is made easier after a few attempts since the enemies have very predictable flight paths). Now even though a skilled jet car pilot can navigate the not so friendly skies without using much ammo, this is still an incredibly difficult section of the game thanks to the fact that both the enemies and their bullets travel at a much faster rate than you do. To make things even more interesting...err...frustrating, is that the clouds will occasionally clip over the enemies and their bullets making them invisible to you (well, invisible until they turn your car into shrapnel). Also, even when they aren't hiding under the clouds the bullets are white, which can make them kind of difficult to see when they are flying over white clouds.

(Side Note: The more I play this the more I'm convinced that Action Fighter began life as a straight up Shump instead of the Spy Hunter knockoff it became. The flying sections are so much more in depth compared to the driving sections that it seems like they were added in simply to beat Nintendo to the punch to have a Spy Hunter type game on the system. Of course Nintendo eventually won the battle by actually having Spy Hunter on the NES the following year).

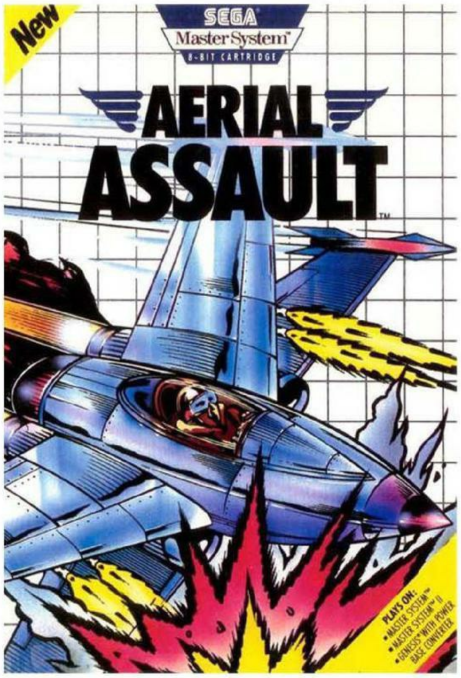
Over the course of the five levels you will bounce back and forth between the air and the ground combat zones, however since you only get two lives after your timer runs out it is going to take a minor miracle for you to even see the words "Level 2". While this extreme level of difficulty was necessary in that era to add replay value, today it is nothing more than an exercise in frustration.

AERIAL ASSAULT

Release Date: 1990
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Shmup
Players: 1

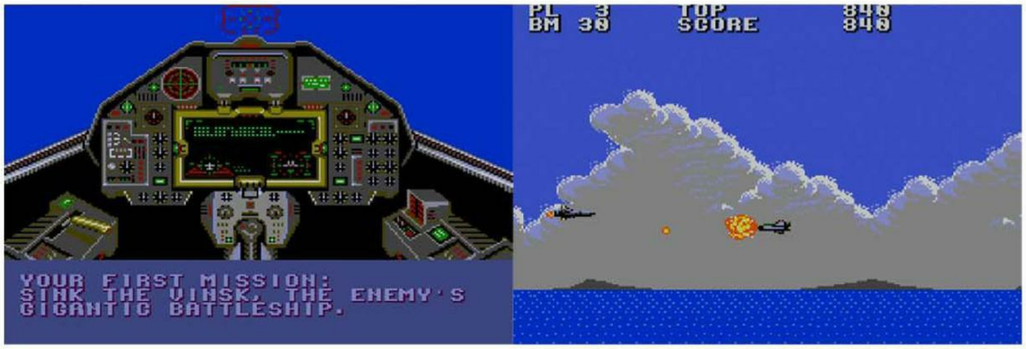
AERIAL
ASSAULT

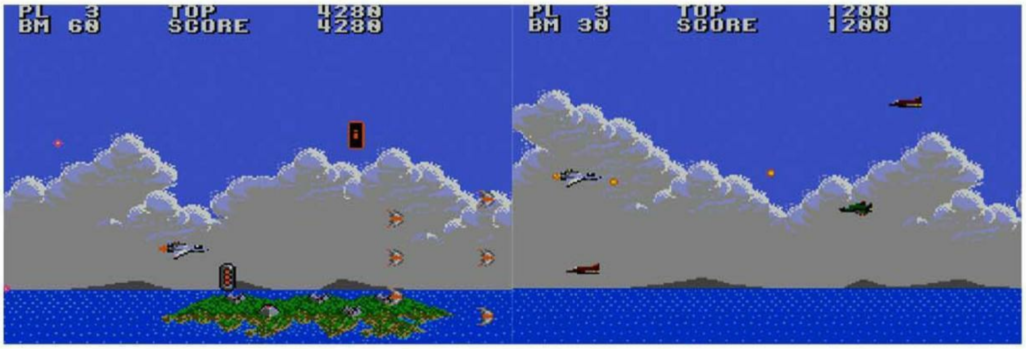

New
SEGA
Master System
8-BIT CARTRIDGE
AERIAL
ASSAULT
PLAYS ON:
• MASTER SYSTEM
• MASTER SYSTEM II
• GENESIS WITH POWER BASE CONVERTER

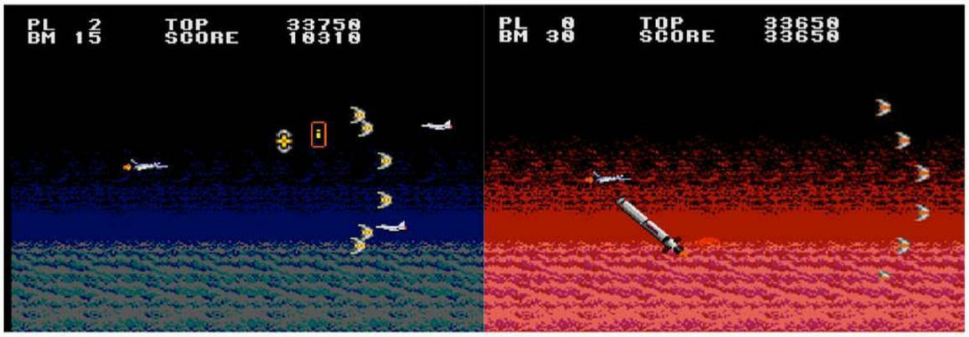
To the casual classic gamer, Aerial Assault might be viewed as a quaint little SHMUP that was held back due to hardware restrictions.

However once one considers that other classics like Lifeforce, R-Type, and Thunder Force 2 came out during the two years preceding the release of Aerial Assault, one is left to wonder how such a poor example of the genre could be produced at this late a date.

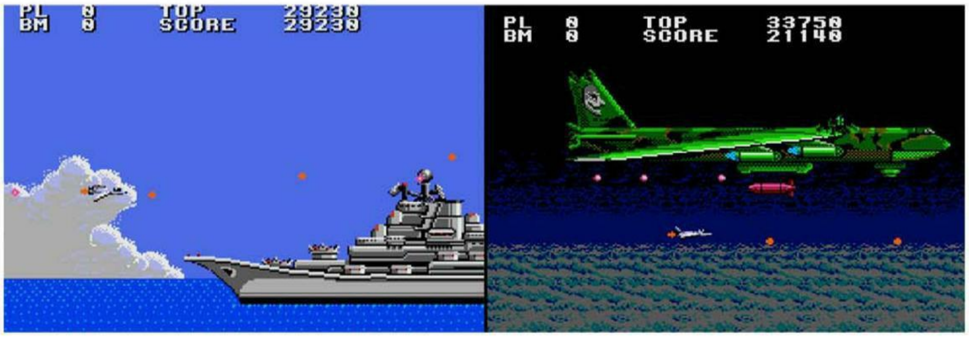
The first thing you'll notice is that there is absolutely nothing original about the game. The enemies appear to have come direct from a stock catalog. Let's look at the first level and count the examples of lack of originality, shall we? Kamikaze pilots that don't shoot but just try to fly into you. Check. Different colored version of same plane as earlier, now flying in different formation and taking a couple of shots at you. Check. Drunken five year old allowed to pilot a couple of the kamikaze ships. Check. Ground based turrets? Check. Boats taking pot shots at you? Check. Submarines that randomly surface and shoot? Check. And for the first level grand finale? A battleship that takes a few thousand rounds of ammo to sink. Yep, not a single original thought in the entire level.


YOUR FIRST MISSION:
SINK THE VINSK, THE ENEMY'S
GIGANTIC BATTLESHIP.
PL 3
BM 30
TOP
SCORE
840
840


PL 3
BM 60
TOP
SCORE
4280
4280
PL 3
BM 30
TOP
SCORE
1200
1200



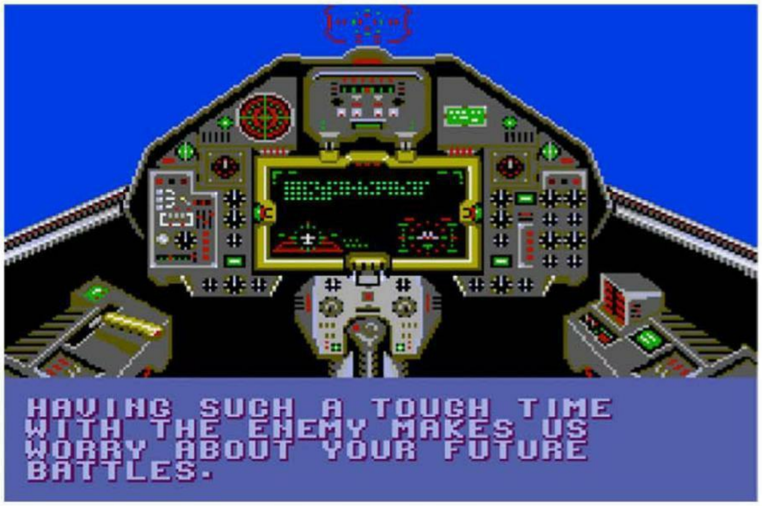
Now as veterans of the genre well know, it doesn't really matter what you shoot as long as you get to shoot them with cool weapons. Sadly there really isn't anything fun here. You start out with a standard pea shooter that is both slow and weak. If you are lucky you can catch a powerup that will put you at the 2nd level, which is the three-way shot. Once you get this you'll be able to wipe the screen clean of any and all flying enemies that come your way, at least until you inadvertently grab another power up. The next level of weapon is quite possibly one of the stupidest weapons for a game like this, a flying claymore mine. Now I know that sounds awesome, and if it had been a secondary weapon it would have been, but given that it takes forever to fire and even longer to detonate, it's not exactly practical in the face of a dozen kamikaze ships coming at you from every direction. Amazingly enough that isn't even the worst weapon in the game. Later on you can get a weapon that can fire in every direction, unfortunately that means that you have to be currently moving in that direction for it to fire that way. This means that if you currently have a plane flying directly at you while you are trying to back off, you will have to risk a crash and fly forward in order to get a shot off at it.



Not satisfied with merely being average, the designers wanted to add something of their own to set themselves apart from the pack. Sadly they picked making the speed of the game slow. Did I say slow? I meant slooooooooooowwwwwww. How slow you ask? I'm pretty sure if you look closely you can see a swimmer in the water below keeping up with your plane as you fly along. And as the late great Billy Mays would say "but wait, there's more". The second level is a master class of frustration. The scrolling clouds beneath you is a really nice graphical touch, unfortunately it contains spontaneous death. The planes that emerge from it are easy enough to dodge, however the giant cruise missiles are not. When these things get going they take up half the screen, and assuming you are stuck with the directional fire weapon, you will be firing off shots at the moon instead of being able to adjust your flight path and take them out. If you survive the missiles you'll be greeted to an incredible lightening storm. As the first bolts flash across the sky you'll be taken aback at just how cool it looks for an 8-Bit game. When the second bolt of lightening hits your plane and reduces it to flaming rubble you'll be taken aback at just how many curse words you can spout out before you respawn.

The final dash of salt in the wound comes during your mission briefings between levels. If you happened to die a few times on the stage the General will openly question his faith in you. Nothing says "Good Luck" like "you are probably going to fail".

All in all, there really isn't much here that is worth playing. If for some reason you have played every single side scrolling shooter in existence and are in need of something new to try, I still don't recommend this one.



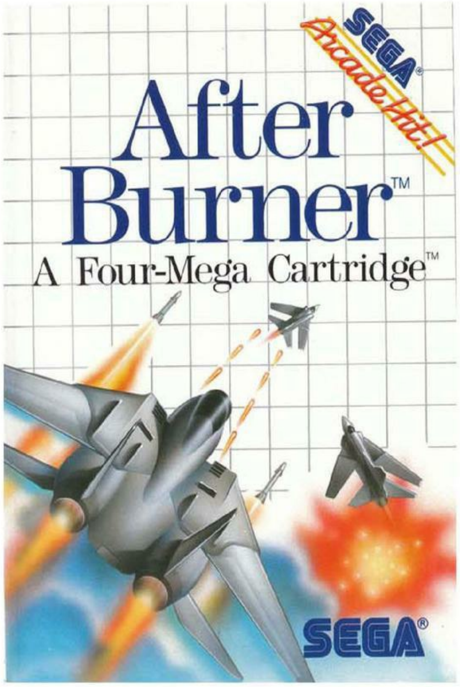
HAVING SUCH A TOUGH TIME WITH THE ENEMY MAKES US WORRY ABOUT YOUR FUTURE BATTLES.

AFTER BURNER

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Flying
Players: 1

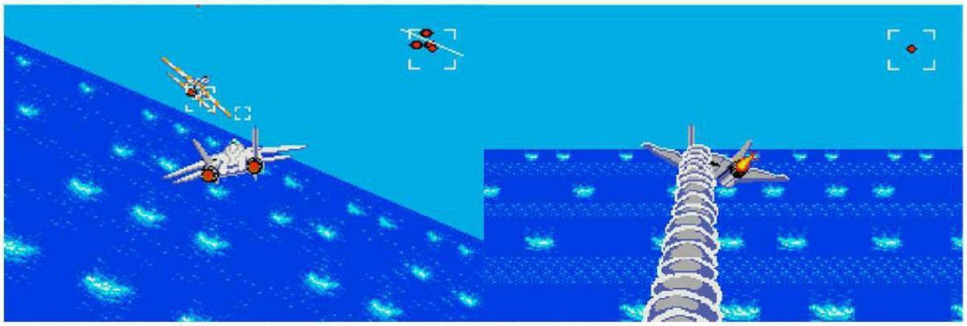
AFTER
BURNER
PUSH START BUTTON
© SEGA 1987

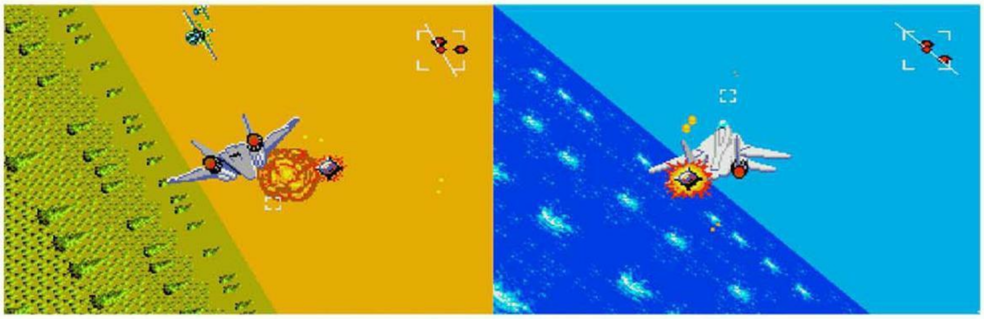

SEGA
Arcade Hit!
After
Burner™
A Four-Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

In this passable port of the popular arcade game you are the pilot of the most heavily armed fighter jet in the history of warfare (seriously, you can hold like 300 missiles).

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to fly through a never ending series of levels and shoot down thousands upon thousands of enemy jets. Of course you are never told who your enemy is, nor why they are your enemy, all you know is there are a lot of them and they are in need of killing.

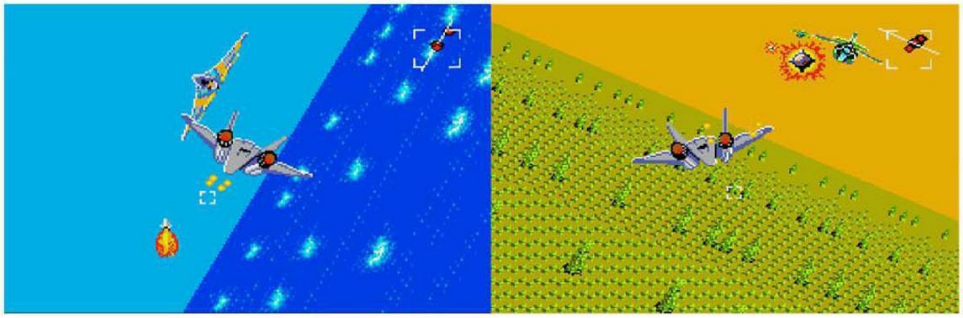
The levels are essentially all the same, just with a slight change to the scenery. For example in one stage you'll be dogfighting over the ocean, then the next you'll be in the desert, and in the following one you'll be fighting over snow covered plains (for the record, whoever can find that kind of terrain all beside one another and close enough for a fighter jet to reach within a single tank of gas gets a gold star). The scenery doesn't impact gameplay in any significant way, and really does nothing except tell you that you are on a new stage.





The gameplay has you flying head on into oncoming fighter jets, while occasionally being passed by formations of enemy jets. While it is never stated who you are fighting, it is painfully obvious they really need to invest in better fighter pilot training. Now, I realize I'm not a military expert, but I'm pretty sure that having your fighter pilots cut off an enemy fighter like an inconsiderate driver during rush hour rather than stay behind them and open fire isn't the most effective way of doing things. Anyway, when they do cut you off you have your choice of cutting the enemy to shreds with your vulcan cannon or heat seeking air to air missiles.

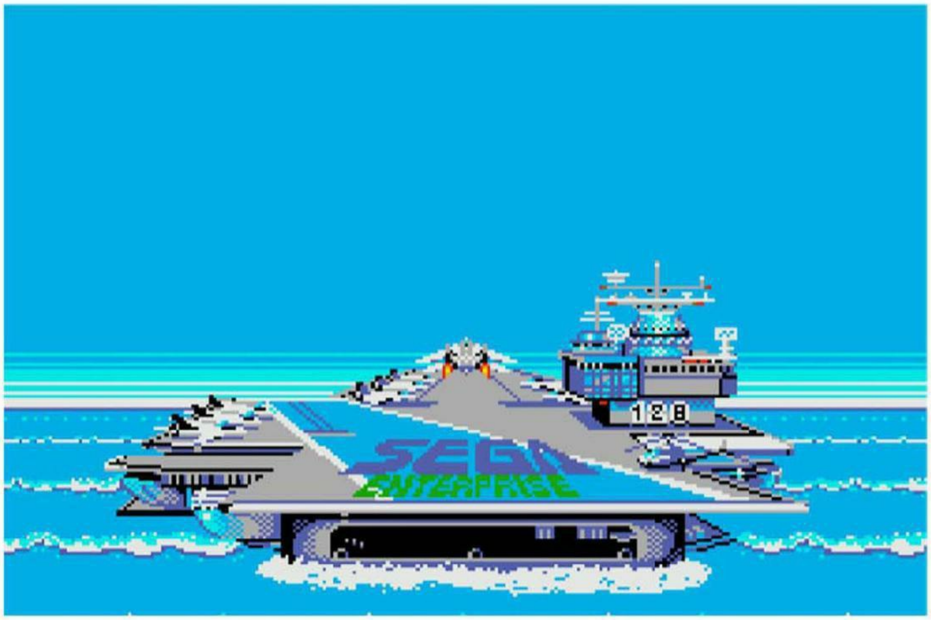
While the graphics push the Master System to its limits, it does have a few drawbacks. For starters the game is incredibly choppy, which makes it difficult to properly pilot a speeding jet fighter. It is way, way too easy to do a barrel roll, which means you will be spending the majority of your time seeing what it's like for your shirts when they endure the spin cycle on the wash. Seriously, if you get dizzy easily it's probably best you don't play this version of After Burner.



The other major problem is that you can't really tell when you are about to be hit by an enemy missile. As a result the only way you will be able to survive is to randomly fly your jet to every corner of the screen while firing as many rockets and vulcan machine gun rounds as you can in the hopes that you will either dodge oncoming fire or shoot it out of the sky. This is unfortunate because it takes all the skill out of the game and turns it into a game of "how lucky am I?".

One thing you will notice at the start of the game is that you are taking off from the deck of an aircraft carrier that is branded with the Sega logo. Now I realize that Sega was popular back in the 80's, but I had no idea they were making so much money that they could fund their own war against their enemies.

As this was originally an arcade game, whose sole purpose was to convince kids to drop quarter after quarter into it in an effort to get the high score for all the world to see, there really isn't much in the way of staying power. There are no bosses, no bonus levels, no nothing. Just constant flying and killing of massive amounts of enemy planes. If you have your heart set on playing After Burner, the Genesis version is far superior, however if you have your heart set on 8-bit this version is playable.

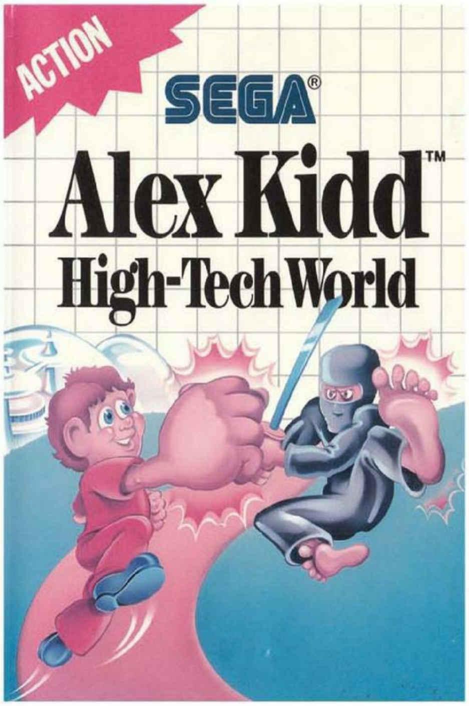


ALEX KIDD IN HIGH TECH WORLD

Release Date: 1989
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Platforming/Adventure
Players: 1

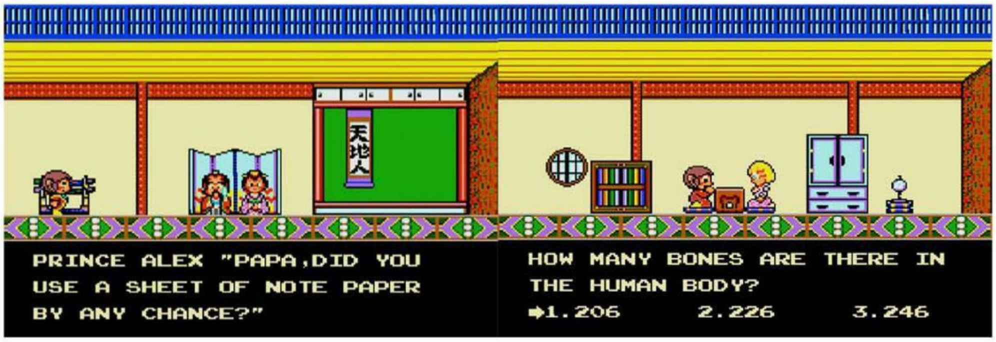
ALEX
KIDD
HIGH TECH WORLD


ACTION
SEGA®
Alex Kidd™
High-Tech World

If you are looking for a textbook example of a video game misfire, then look no further because this is quite possibly the worst sequel in the history of video games. Seriously, it is that bad.

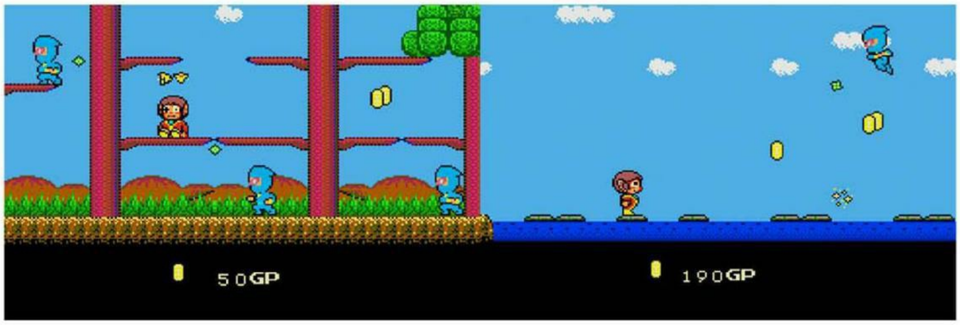
The Alex Kidd games morphed from one of the most difficult games of the 8-bit era to the easiest game of the 8-bit era to this one, which can only be described as the most annoying of the 8-bit era. The game is broken up into four segments: Looking for the map, ninja attack, Looking for a travel pass, and more ninjas.

The game begins with you at home in your 6 level castle where you are informed of a new arcade the next town over that closes at 5 p.m.. Unfortunately the map to the arcade has been cut up into 8 pieces and hidden around the castle. In order to retrieve the map pieces you must endure a lengthy process of trial and error as well as pointless exploration. Basically you have to go on a room by room search and hope that you stumble upon a piece. Of course you also have to do specific tasks like take a test from your teacher in order to get a piece. The test segment should sum up just how bad this game is. It's a ten question test that you must ace in order to proceed. The questions range from the simple (What is the capital of Japan?) to the more obscure (How many bones are in the human body?) to the downright impossible (What is the name of the 15th level in Space Harrier?). Now I know what you are thinking, and yes today the answers to those questions are easily obtained. Back in 1989 however there was no such thing as the internet, so you either had to grab an encyclopedia or you could go through trial an error (which given there are 3 answers for each of the 10 questions it meant that there were just over 59,000 combinations). If by some miracle you were able to find all the pieces and assemble the map, you are reward with the opportunity to fight ninjas in the woods. Don't get too excited though, it's way less fun that it sounds.



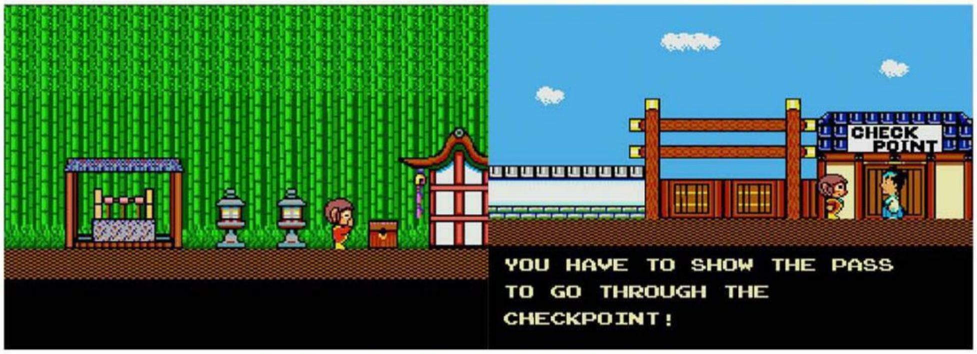
PRINCE ALEX "PAPA,DID YOU USE A SHEET OF NOTE PAPER BY ANY CHANCE?"

HOW MANY BONES ARE THERE IN THE HUMAN BODY?
➡1.206 2.226 3.246

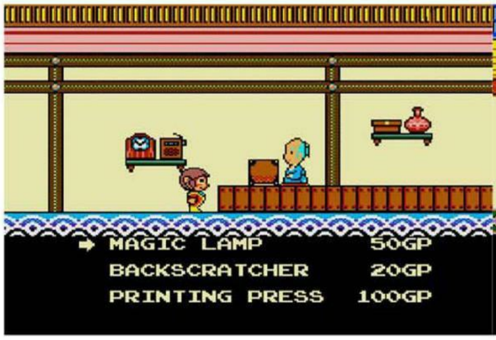


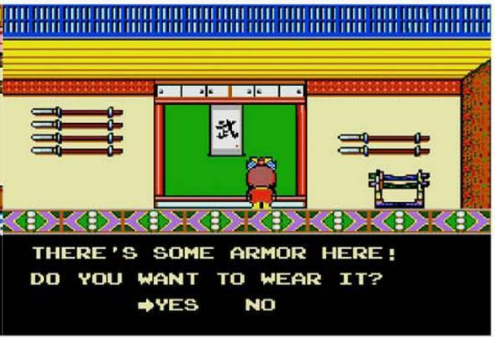
The two ninja fighting stages are short poorly designed platforming stages where you run from left to right and try to get to the exit. Both of these levels feature one hit deaths that send you back to the very beginning of the level. It also has incredibly poor jumping controls, which will often lead to you drowning in a foot of water. Seriously, if you land in the water Alex Kidd will freak out because the water is up to his knees, and then apparently he dies of a panic attack because instead of pulling himself out of the shallow stream the level starts over. On the plus side of things you have unlimited lives, with each death only taking a few minutes off the clock. On the down side of things you will have to run through the same dozen or so easy ninjas time and time again before you have the opportunity to miss your jump and die in a puddle for the twenty-third time. Also during this portion of the game you can collect gold coins, which plays an important role in the next stage.

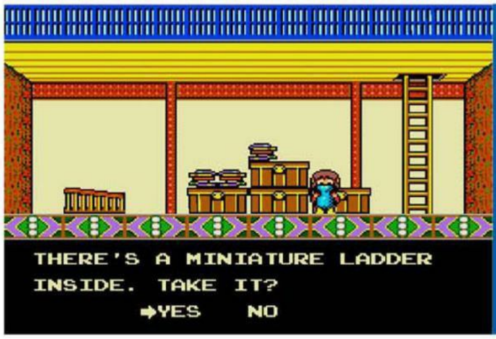
After making it through the ninja infested woods you come across another town. Rather than simply pass through the village you must find a travel pass before the guard will let you leave. Now there are a lot of distractions in this village, like being able to buy books and antiques and whatnot, but all you have to do is find the temple and pray 100 times. Yes, 100 freaking times.

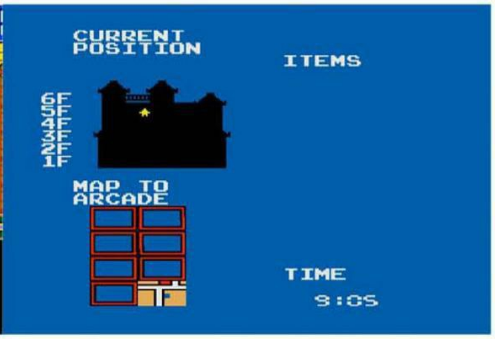


YOU HAVE TO SHOW THE PASS
TO GO THROUGH THE
CHECKPOINT!


➡ MAGIC LAMP 50GP
BACKSCRATCHER 20GP
PRINTING PRESS 100GP


THERE'S SOME ARMOR HERE!
DO YOU WANT TO WEAR IT?


THERE'S A MINIATURE LADDER
INSIDE. TAKE IT?


CURRENT POSITION
ITEMS
6F
5F
4F
3F
2F
1F
MAP TO ARCADE
TIME
9:05

This takes about 5 minutes of real world time to step back and forth and pray over and over and over and over and over again. Once you hit the magic number, God rewards you with a travel pass so you can venture out into another ninja infested area. If you survive the next area congratulations, you get to play Sega games at the arcade!

Needless to say, there are major problems present here. Several have been listed so far, but the pain hardly stops there. In the "adventure" portion of the game there are several items you can pick up that will cause an automatic game over (like putting on armor that makes you too heavy to move or picking up a gun that puts you in jail). A lot of the instant game over items don't have any rhyme or reason to them, they just happen to cause a game over.

This is without a doubt the weakest entry into the Alex Kidd series. However if you'd like to experience the full punishment this game dishes out (and don't want to figure out how to find all the map pieces) use this code to skip to the ninja portion of the game (case sensitive: LgqaBOqMSa).

ALEX KIDD IN HIGH TECH WORLD

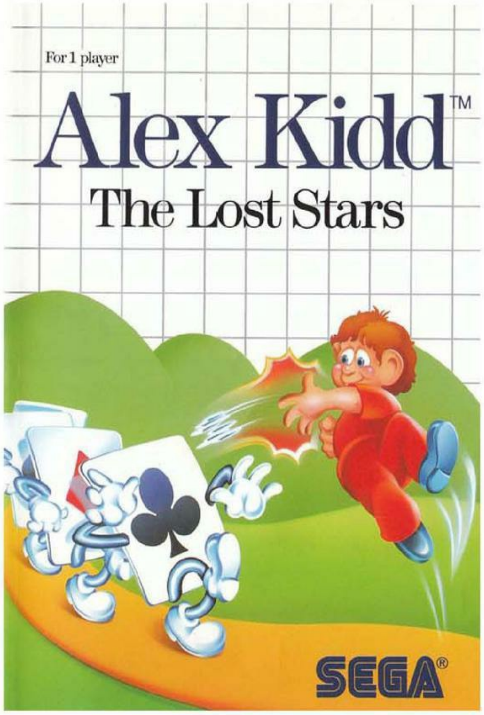
ALEX KIDD: THE LOST STARS

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1

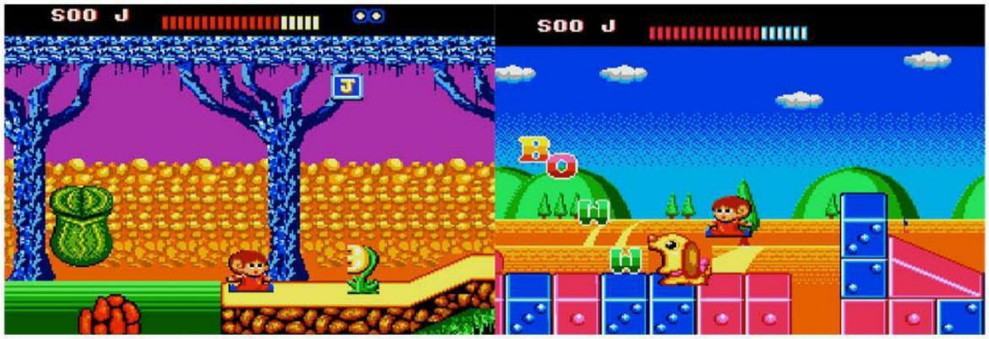
HI SCORE 0
Alex Kidd
· THE LOST STARS ·
PUSH START BUTTON

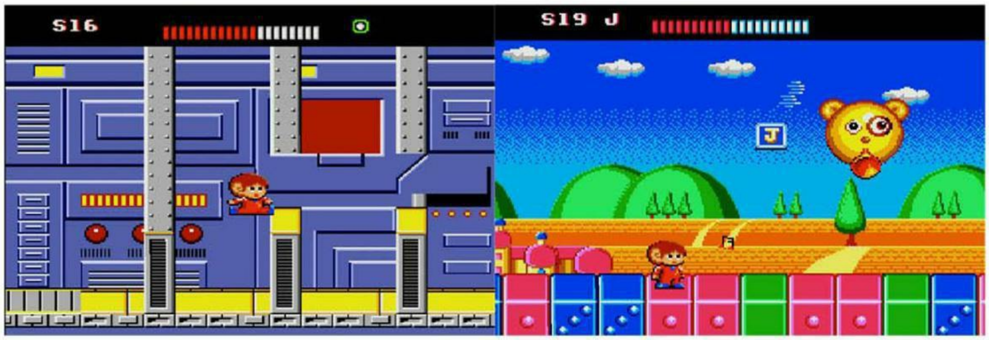
This is the second game in the Alex Kidd franchise, and it is about as far away from the original as a sequel can get.

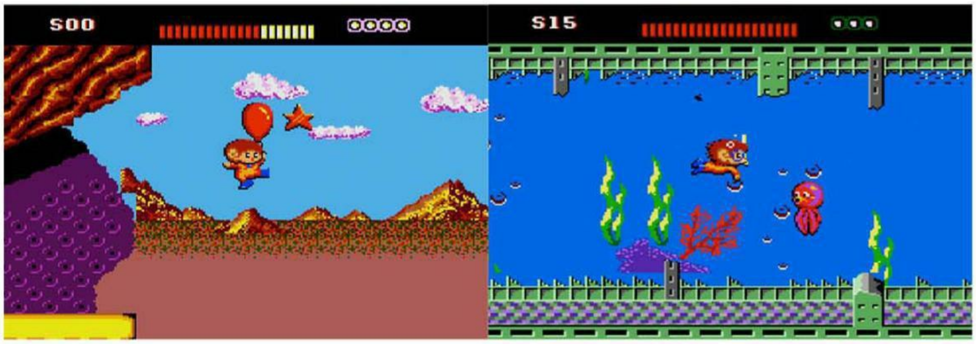

For 1 player
Alex Kidd™
The Lost Stars
SEGA®

Alex Kidd in Miracle World was aimed at fans of hardcore platforming action, and even today it is still one of the most difficult games around. The Lost Stars however is aimed at kids and is quite possibly the easiest game, not just on the Master System, but in the entire 8-Bit universe.

The biggest departure from the original is the fact that instead of lives you have a slow moving timer. There are still one hit deaths so to speak, but instead of having to start the level over from the beginning you simply explode (taking your enemy out as well. Apparently Alex Kidd is now a suicide bomber), then you respawn at the exact same spot with the only punishment being a couple bars on the timer going away. Now this could have resulted in a challenging gameplay experience, but given the fact that timer bonuses show up about every seven steps it almost never becomes an issue.



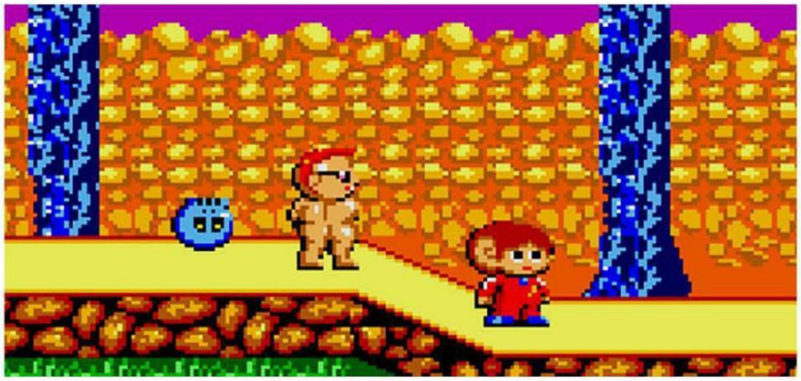


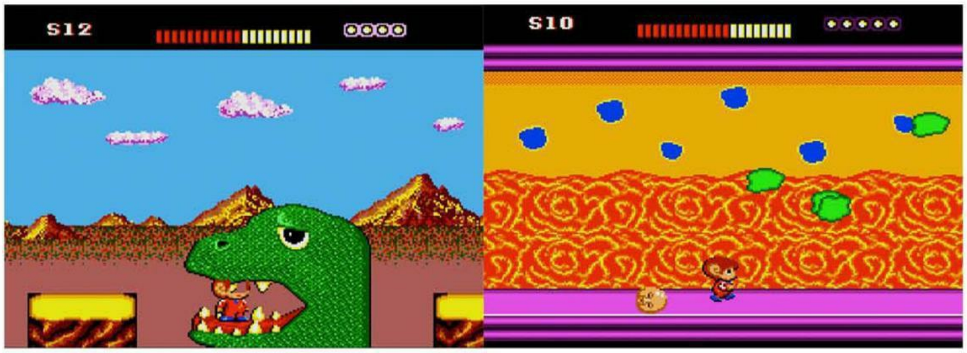


The other major change is that instead of Alex Kidd being able to use his oversized fist to inflict massive damage on the enemies that cross his path he instead chooses a more pacifist approach. Seriously, the hero in the game has no basic attack. None. Sure he can pick up a special icon that lets him throw a limited number of what looks like wind, but that's it. As a result Alex Kidd is nothing more than a polite tourist on these levels, out to enjoy a leisurely stroll through hostile territory.

Now this might have been a problem if he was under constant attack, but there are so few enemies in the game that you can probably count the number that you come across while running through the level. And for the most part the enemies are non-threatening to say the least. I mean the first enemy you run across in the game is a cute little dog that "attacks" by spitting out colorful letters that spell out "Bow Wow". Yeah, did I mention the game was aimed at kids?

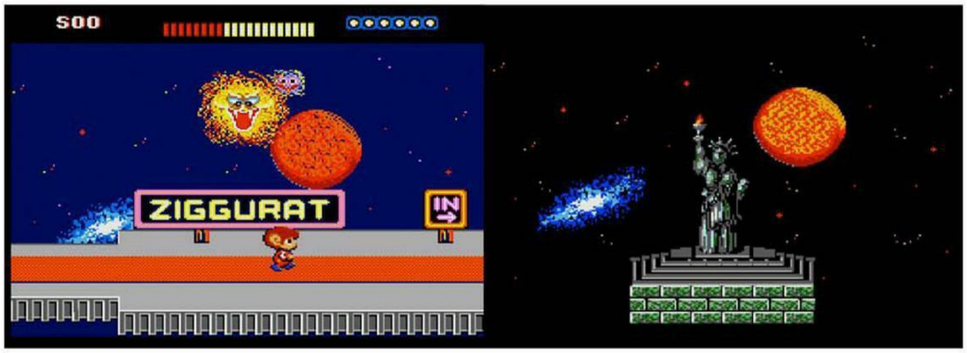
(Side Note: There is one curious enemy present here. About halfway through the game you'll come across a naked guy that farts spinning skulls at you. Yes, you read that correctly. I don't have any other commentary other than "wow").





There is some variety to the levels, at least when it comes to themes. There are seven different locales that range from Toy Land to Monster World to Machine World and even the Moon. The gameplay remains the same on every one of them except for Water World where you have to swim instead of run. There are a grand total of 14 stage, but there are only 7 different levels due to the fact that they repeat. Supposedly they become tougher the second time around but honestly the first run through is so easy it will be hard to tell the difference. Seriously, I ran through the first 7 levels in 12 minutes without having to continue, and that includes pausing to write notes and grab another cup of coffee.

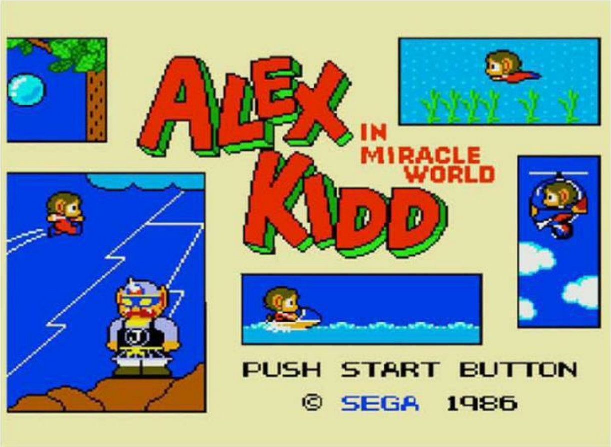
It is quite apparent that The Lost Stars is aimed at the younger crowd. If you are 6 and never played a video game before then this could be a challenging game. However for everyone else this is about as simple as they come.

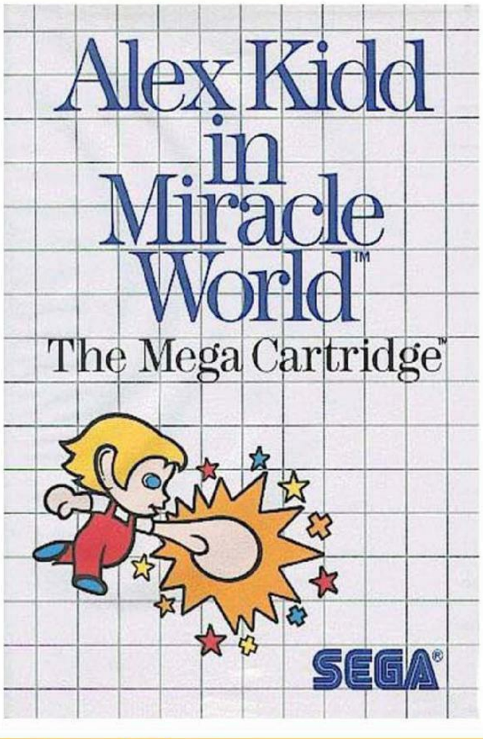


ALEX KIDD IN MIRACLE WORLD

Release Date: 1986
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1


ALEX KIDD
IN MIRACLE WORLD
PUSH START BUTTON
© SEGA 1986

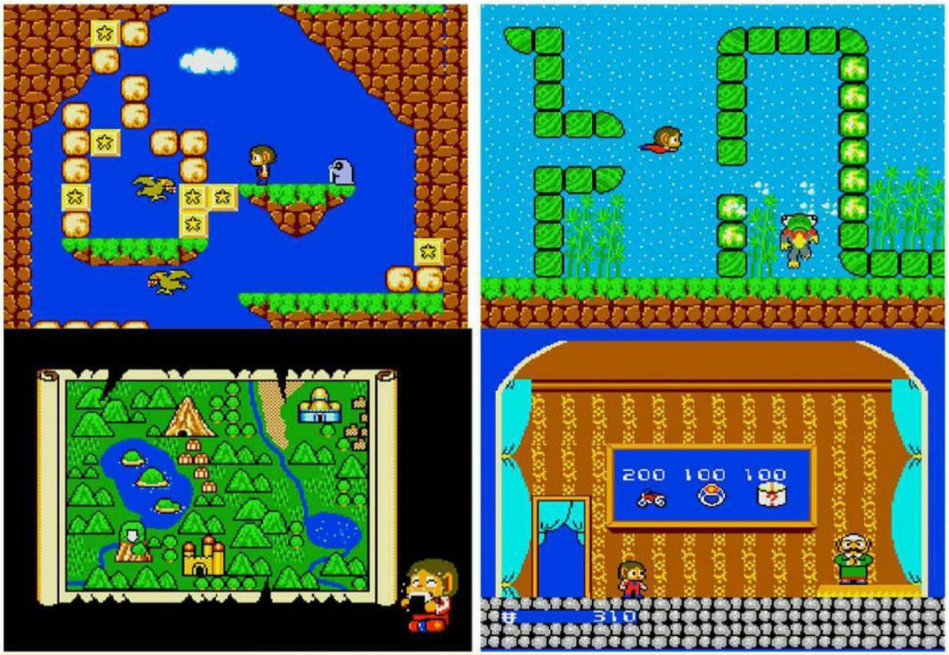

Alex Kidd in Miracle World™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

This was the first of four games on the Master System to star Alex Kidd, and it is one of the hardest most frustrating games ever to grace a TV screen.

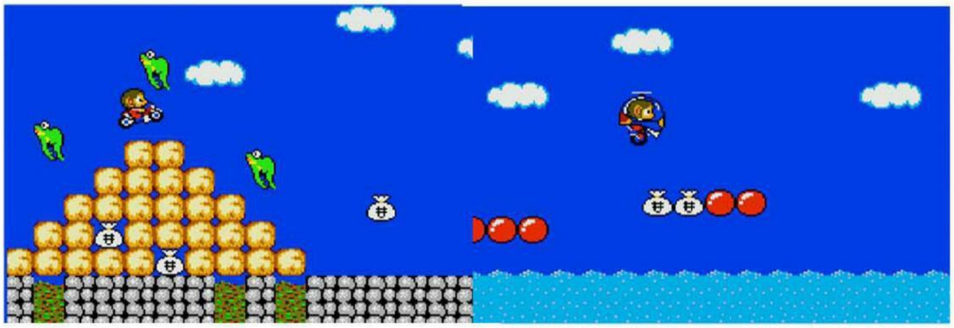
Alex Kidd in Miracle World is a perfect example of what an old school, hardcore 8-Bit Action Platformer was all about. They really don't come much tougher than this. For starters, everything, and I mean everything can kill you in one hit. Run into a bird? Dead. Get breathed on by a frog? Dead. Get bitten by a piranha? Well, that one is pretty accurate. To make things even more difficult, there are no continues. None. So a game with one hit deaths (many of them incredibly cheap) doesn't let you continue, which means if you make it to the 4th or 5th level congratulations, you have seen things few people outside of the design team have seen.

(Side Note: Yes, I am aware that there is a continue code, however without looking it up on the internet you would never know that it exists. In my book that doesn't count as having continues. Plus upon trying it the code did not work for me, which isn't a surprise since it's nothing more than holding up and hitting the button as fast as you can in the hopes that the game grants you a continue.)

The story is fleshed out as you progress through the game. Basically you are the long lost Prince of Radaxian (greatest country name ever), and it's your destiny to overthrow the tyrants who have taken over the country. Granted it's not much of a story, but given this was 1986 and the extent of stories in Action-Platformers consisted of "Our Princess is in another castle", this was at least a step in the right direction.

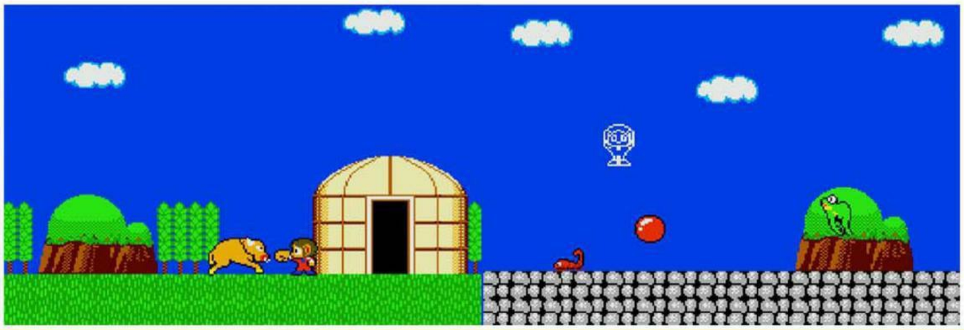


ALEX KIDD IN MIRACLE WORLD



Alex Kidd's primary weapon is a giant fisted punch. Not only can it take out most enemies in a single hit, but it can also break most bricks, including special bricks that contain items to help you on your quest. Most of them have money bags so you can buy items in shops, but some have power rings which allow you to briefly shoot out projectiles from your giant fist. But be careful because every now and then those enticing gold blocks hold a mini-grim reaper that will chase you to your grave. At the start of some levels you have the opportunity to do a bit of shopping. You can buy more rings, but why waste your money on that when you can get yourself a hot ride. The motorcycle makes your journey a bit easier, as you can just roll right through both blocks and enemies, and you can do some sweet jumps as well. Of course without warning, unbreakable blocks will suddenly appear that will throw you off your bike, usually into an enemy. If you aren't paying attention you'll be on your bike for about 6 seconds.

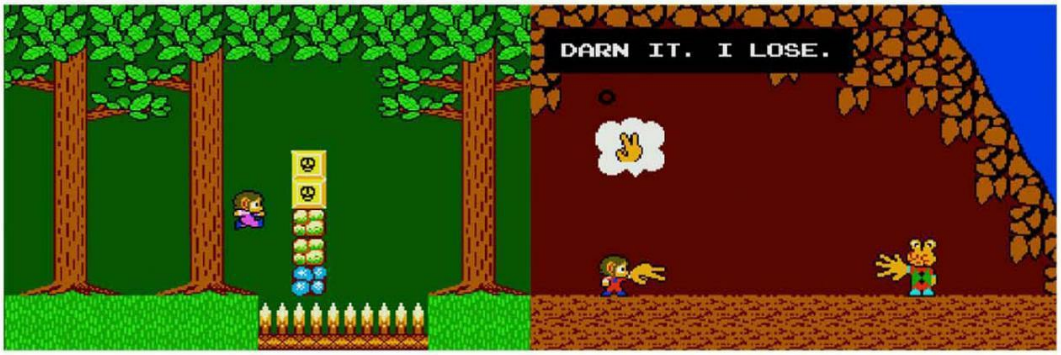
There are two types of boss battles, mini-bosses and main bosses. The mini-bosses look like normal enemies, only they are larger and require more hits. An example of this is the bull boss that is peacefully grazing until you punch it in the face. As one would expect, the bull gets angry and charges you, which means you have to keep punching it in the face until it finally drops dead. Now I know what you are all thinking, if Alex Kidd is tough enough to beat a bull to death with his bare hands, then why does he die if a goldfish touches him? Alas, there is no good answer to be found.



The main boss fights are a major letdown. Instead of having an epic battle against good and evil with the fate of the nation hanging in the balance, your differences are settled the same way that two drunk friends settle who gets shotgun. Rock, Paper, Scissors. Seriously. Who knew that the only thing needed to defeat a tyrant was to beat him two out of three at Rock, Paper, Scissors? Now this would be bad enough on its own, but amazingly it gets worse thanks to the fact that if you keep track of how you beat each boss you can defeat them every single time since they select their choice in a pattern. Of course since the game has one hit deaths and no continues, if you compete in more than two of these battles consider yourself lucky.

As you can imagine, the game is virtually impossible to finish. Even though the beginning levels are tough, the game actually has the nerve to ramp up the difficulty in the later levels. To give you an idea of just how difficult, there is an impossible setup near the beginning of the 6th or 7th stage that requires you to leap out over a spiked pit, punch a block that causes paralysis, and then move back over safe territory before the paralysis sets in and you plummet to your death. It takes a couple of tries before you get the hang of it, which means you are a couple steps closer to a game over screen. So if you do get the hang of it and die shortly after that you only have twenty minutes or so of frustrating gameplay in front of you before you can use your newfound skill again on those blocks.

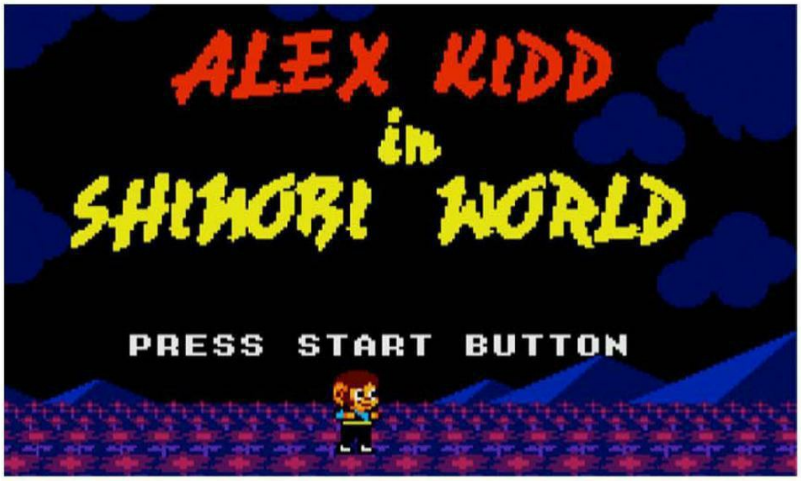
Yes the game is "throw you controller across the room" difficult, and yes you are more likely to finish a marathon while carrying a midget on your back than you are likely to finish this game, but it's still worth playing. This is by far one of the best examples of the genre on an 8-Bit system.

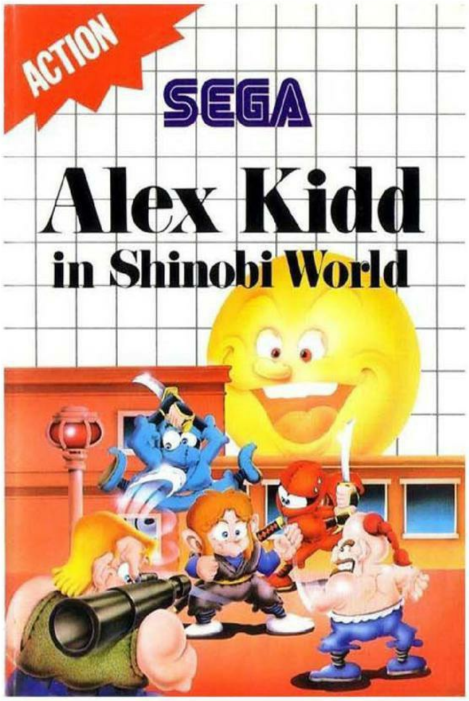


ALEX KIDD IN SHINOBI WORLD

Release Date: 1990
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1

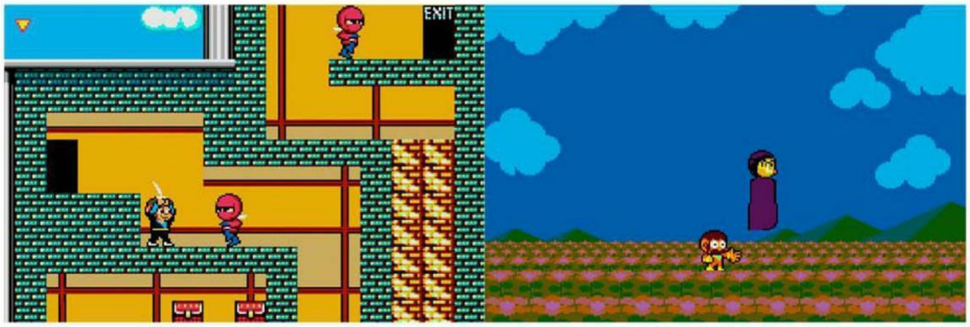

ALEX KIDD
in
SHINOBI WORLD
PRESS START BUTTON

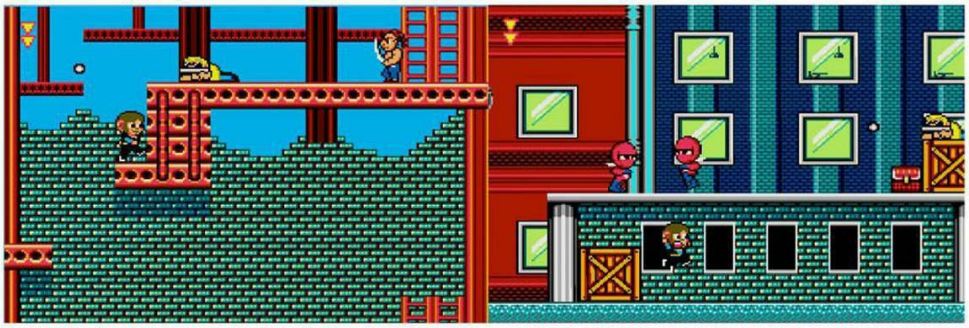

ACTION
SEGA
Alex Kidd
in Shinobi World

This was among the last games released for the Sega Master System.

Conceived as a parody of another popular Sega franchise, Shinobi, Alex Kidd found himself donning ninja gear in order to rescue his kidnapped girlfriend. And given that it is a parody, it remains to be seen if the kidnapped girlfriend was a serious plot point, or if they were making fun of the fact that seemingly every game of that era had the kidnapped girlfriend as the driving force behind the plot.

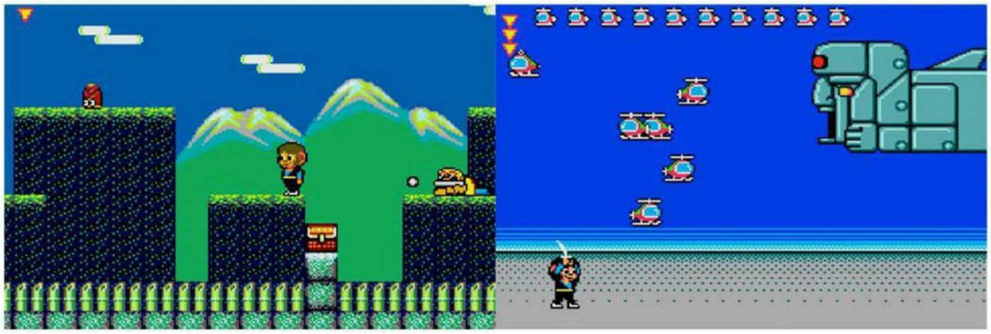
The story begins with The Dark Ninja appearing out of nowhere to ruin your picnic and kidnap your girlfriend. Shortly after that an ancient ghost guy appears and tells you that you must stop him before he is able to seize the ultimate power while holding your girlfriend hostage. Now it makes absolutely no sense why, if you were trying to seize the ultimate power, you would kidnap someone that played no role in achieving that power. I mean chances are you are going to have enough enemies as it is, so why create more? Of course I guess it wouldn't be much of a game without that plot point, so hey, let's roll with it.





The game itself has some very nice, if not simple, platforming action. Borrowing very heavily from the level design of Shinobi, Alex Kidd in Shinobi World has you running and jumping over stacked crates while slicing and dicing ninjas, sword throwers, and the occasional gunslinger. There is some nice variety to the levels, so it's not all just walk from left to right while killing everything on the way. Some hidden rooms are scattered about that require you to break blocks, use wall jumps, and even turn yourself into a fireball in order to collect the powerups and make it to the exit. In later levels you have to make some difficult jumps over bottomless pits, climb to the highest reaches of a waterfall, and off course, since you are a ninja and this is an 8-bit game, there are also killer birds that show up to torment you.

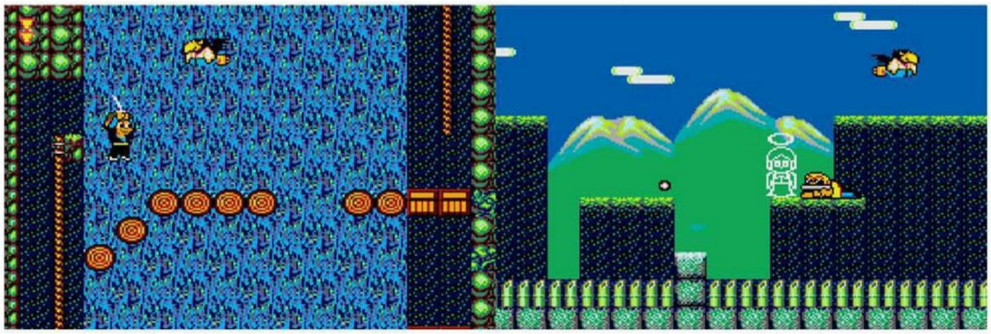
You start out with a basic ninja sword, but along the way you can grab powerups. The first powerup gives you the ability to create a shield as you swing your sword, while the other one replaces your sword with shurikens. For most of the bosses it is imperative that you track down the shurikens, and for the second level boss it's imperative that you don't.



In addition to weapon powerups, the chests also contain hearts which give you an additional hit. This is something of a departure from the genre standard of one hit deaths, and frankly it's a welcome change. There is still a decent difficulty level present here, but it's not the crippling difficulty usually found within the genre. Don't get me wrong, the game will still challenge you, but it won't be frustrating to the point of throwing your controller across the room.

During the initial design of Alex Kidd in Shinobi World it was to be known as Shinobi Kid, but after realizing the need to develop a mascot along the lines of Nintendo's Mario, Alex Kidd was tossed into the mix. Mario was even scheduled to make an appearance as the fist boss, and even though the name was changed, it is still evident what the designers were going for. The boss even shrinks down in size after taking a few hits, just like Mario.

This was the fourth and ultimately final game for Alex Kidd. There were plans to create more parody games staring Alex Kidd based on other Sega properties like Phantasy Star and Golden Axe, but all of that was put on hold once a certain spiky haired speedster appeared on the scene. It's sad that this was the final game for Alex Kidd, because it was the first truly fun game in the series.



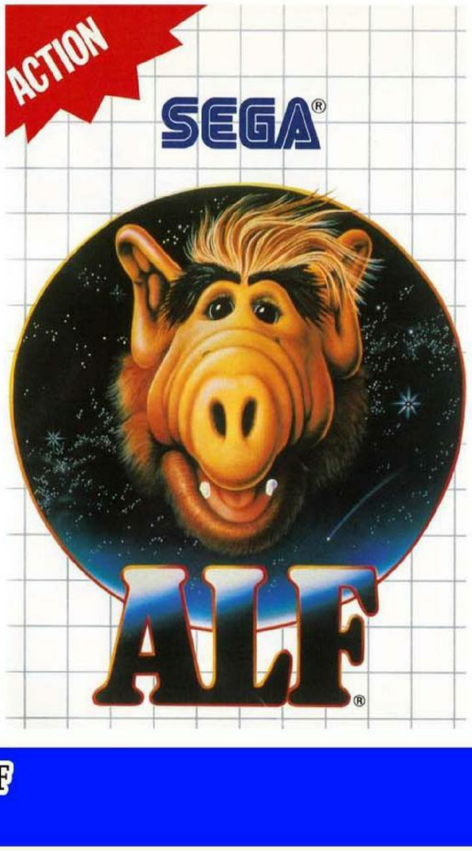
ALF

Release Date: 1989
Developer: Nexa Corp
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1

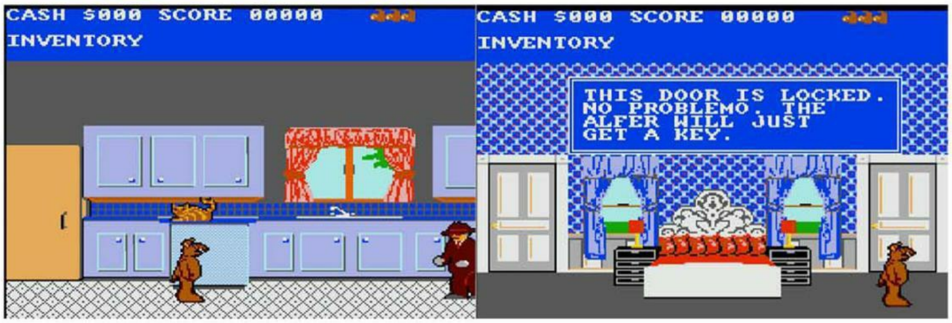
ALF®
© 1989 SEGA

This is a simplistic, completely frustrating example of just how bad a licensed property game can be.

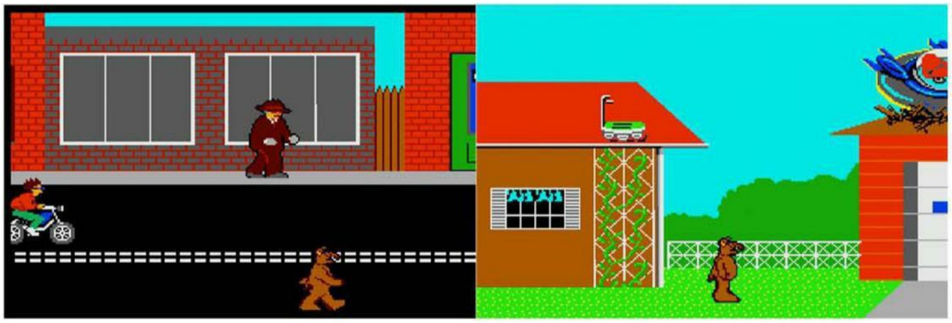

ACTION
SEGA®
ALF®

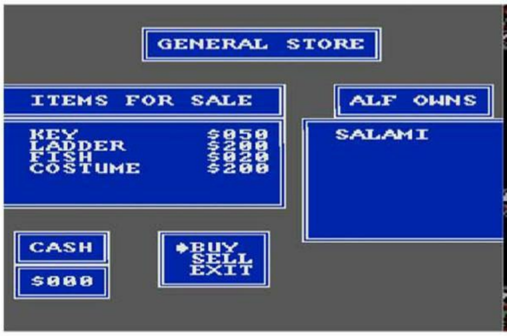
For starters, how in the world can you look at a show with a four foot tall fur ball alien who sits in a house and does little more than chase the family cat around and say "you know, I think this will make a great video game". Sadly the creators of this game didn't follow through with the cat chasing simulator and instead decided to send Alf out into the world in search of parts to fix his broken space scooter so that he may be reunited with his long lost love Rhonda. The end result is a halfhearted attempt at making a puzzle action platformer, and it falls short on all accounts.

You open the game in your families back yard and have the choice of going inside the house or go out wandering down Main Street. If you choose the street you'll have to avoid a spiky haired kid who is riding on the back of a motorcycle as well as an army of creepy child molesters wearing bad suits who walks around with their grubby little hands out just hoping someone bumps into it. If you choose the house you'll also be greeted by members of the child molestation army, as well as the poor tormented house cat who for some reason is willing to help you out in your time of need (perhaps it just wants to get rid of you).



THIS DOOR IS LOCKED.
NO PROBLEMO. THE
ALFER WILL JUST
GET A KEY.

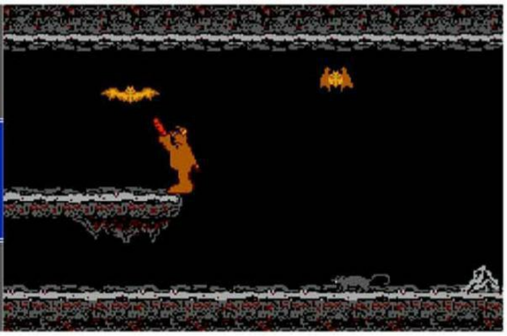




KEY $050
LADDER $200
FISH $020
COSTUME $200

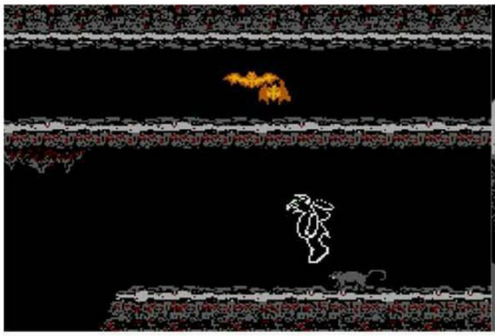
SALAMI

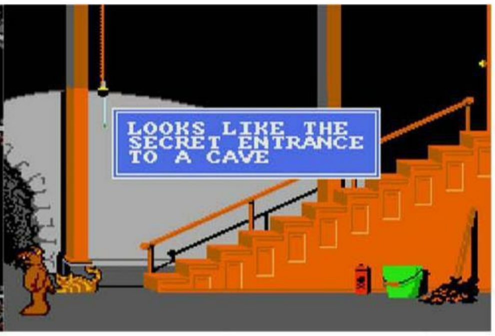
CASH
$000



The cat helps you out by chasing away the rat in the basement, which lets you access the giant cavern that is hiding in your basement. Why nobody has ever noticed the fact that one of the largest unexplored cavern systems just happens to have an opening in the basement of your house is never explained. What lies within this cave is something extraordinary, as it will arguably be the single worst gaming experience in your entire life. Seriously, words can't express just how frustratingly bad this next section is.

Now, assuming you armed yourself with the salami from the fridge, you are sent into battle against rats and bats with the single worst weapon in video game history. Not only does it have the range of, well, a salami, it is impossible to hit anything at all. The collision detection is so bad that even if your weapon comes into direct contact with a bat, it still won't hit it. To make this section even more difficult, the bats have two speeds, fast and warp speed, while Alf has one. Lumbering. Oh yeah, did I mention the game has one hit deaths? Yep, if anything touches you Alf turns into a chalk outline floating up to alien heaven.

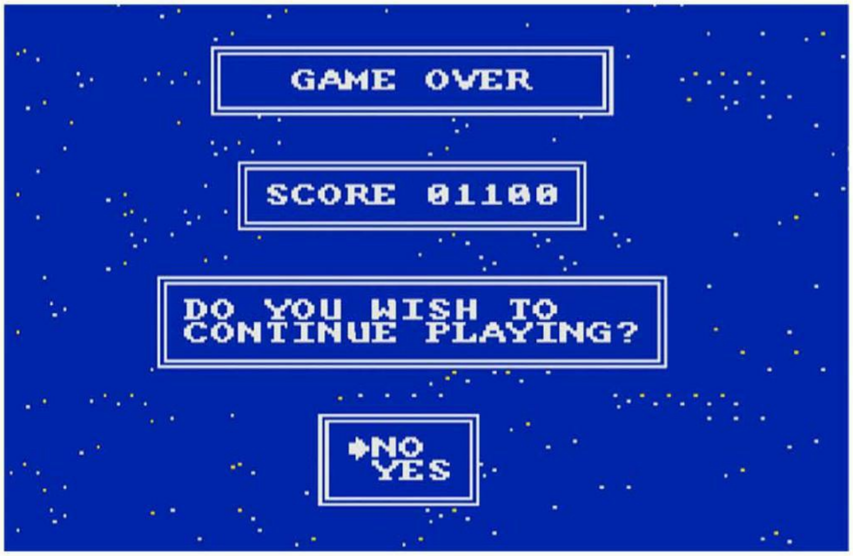




LOOKS LIKE THE SECRET ENTRANCE TO A CAVE

If by some miracle you make it through the cave section you earn the right to go buy stuff at the General Store, which let's you do things like swim in enemy infested water, and of course venture back into the cave later on. Honestly, the only thing that the game has going for it is that there are a total of 11 steps needed to complete it (and half of those involve buying or selling stuff).

This is by far the worst game on the Master System, one of the worst of the 8-Bit era, and arguably among the top ten worst games of all time. The game is so bad that it even acknowledges it. How else do you explain the default continue option being "No"?



GAME OVER

SCORE 01100

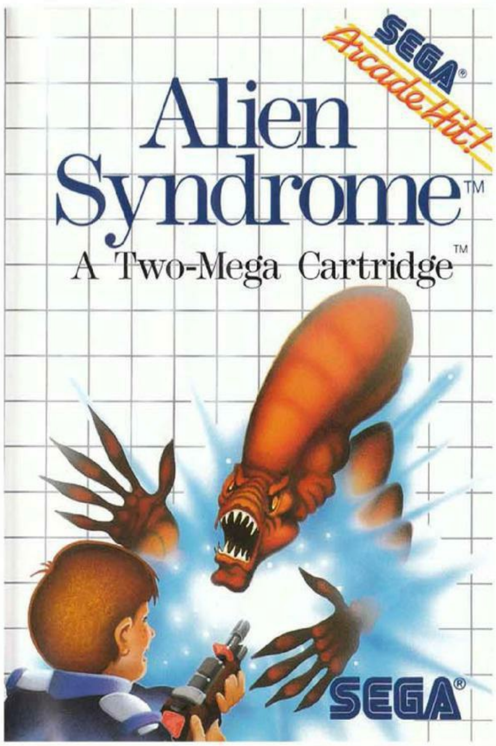
DO YOU WISH TO CONTINUE PLAYING?

ALIEN SYNDROME

Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1 -2

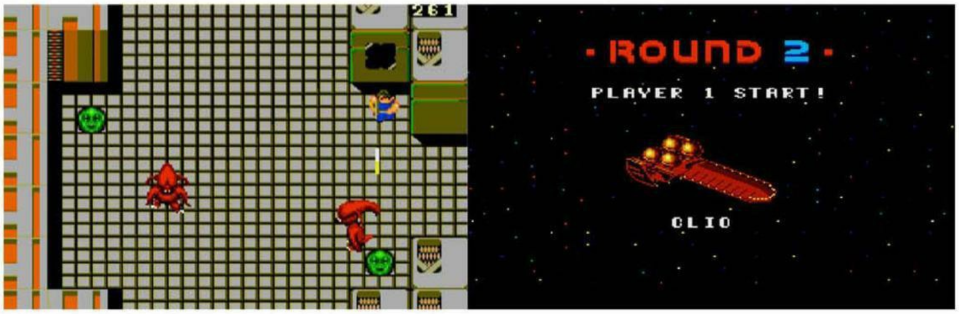
ALIEN SYNDROME
RICKY

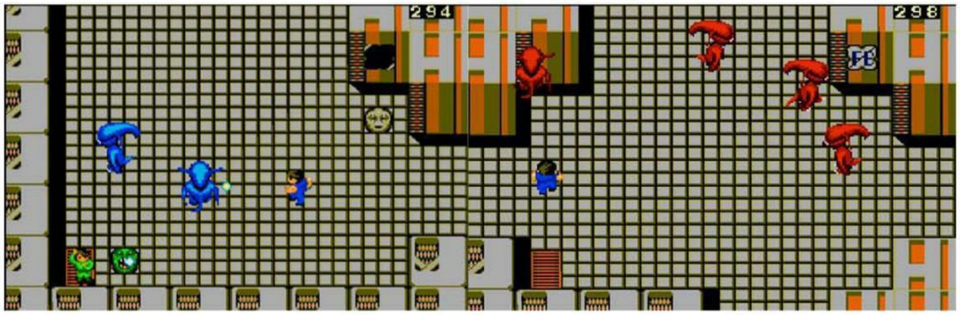

SEGA
Arcade Hit!
Alien Syndrome™
A Two-Mega Cartridge™
SEGA

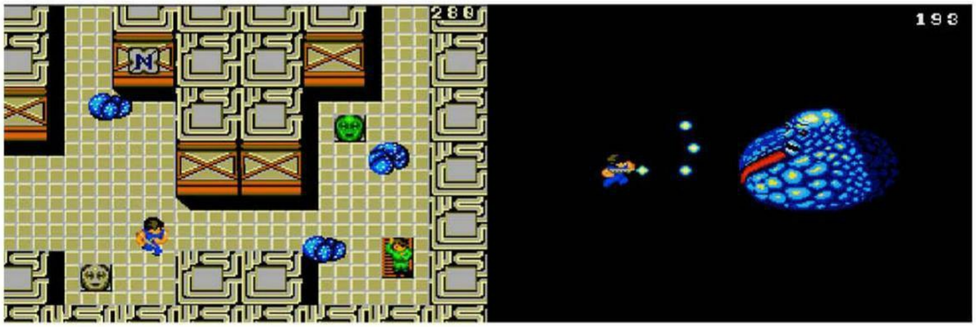
Alien Syndrome puts you in control of a daring two man rescue team who has been sent out to disabled ships to extract the surviving crew members from an invasion of hideous aliens.

While the arcade version is a fast paced alien slaying good time, the Master System version leaves out a few key details. Each of the seven levels (or ships) play out the same way. Thanks to your superiors deciding to set a time bomb on the ship filled with people in need of rescue, you have a limited amount of time to locate everyone, find the exit, and successfully defeat the boss. Why, if the ship is going to be going up into flames in a matter of minutes, do you stop to fight a giant vicious alien rather than running as fast as you can for the escape pod is beyond me, but hey, what's a game like this without boss fights?

The enemies are your standard run of the mill aliens. The first level is populated with a...umm...homage to the Alien franchise alien. From there the aliens get a little more generic and less recognizable (think alien slugs and alien blobs). When you enter a new screen they will randomly spawn by flashing a few times to let you know that you should probably not be standing there. This also gives you an opportunity to line them up in your sights to take them out just as they are taking their very first steps. Of course if you haven't powered up your main weapon this could be an issue.

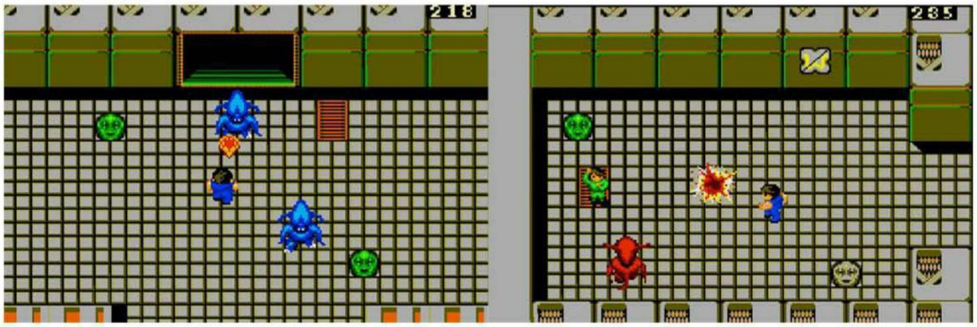






For some reason you have decided to embark on a dangerous rescue mission with a gun that has all the range of a short sword. Seriously, you could fire you gun, reach out and pick up the bullet you just fired off the ground, put it back into your gun and shoot it again, all without taking a single step. Thankfully there are several powerups that are readily available around the ship. The fireball gun is nice, but once you get your hands on the laser then everything else is just child's play. The laser is nothing but pure devastation. Not only can it shoot all the way across the screen, but a single shot will tear through everything that crosses its path. This makes clearing a screen of aliens incredibly easy. Sadly though, if you die you lose your powered up weapon. If this happens on the main part of the level it's not that big of a deal since there are powerups on just about every screen. If this happens at a boss then, well, good luck.

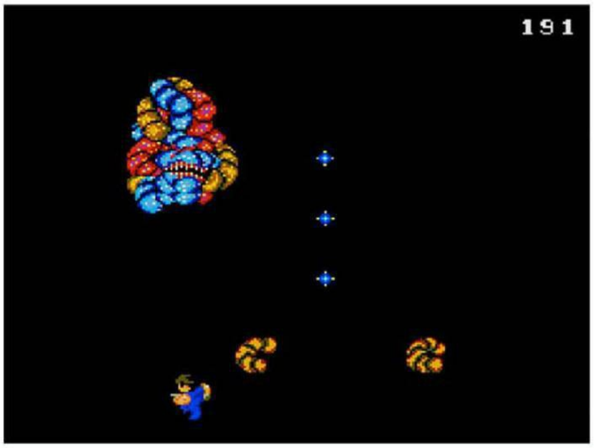
The boss fights can get a little frustrating if you die, since your default weapon has about half the range as Cloud's sword from Final Fantasy VII. Fighting a boss battle with that gun means you have to get close enough to the giant hideous alien that you could give it a hug (if you were so inclined that is). The only good thing about that gun is that it does pack a decent punch, so even if you do have to risk life and limb to make contact with it, at least you will be doing some damage.



There are some serious drawbacks to this particular port of the arcade classic that prevent this from being the definitive console version (or even the definitive 8-bit console version). The most notable of these is the fact that there is no co-op play. This is quite frankly inexcusable since that was 95% of the fun of the arcade game. There is a two player option though, but it is alternating turns rather than fighting as a team. The other main feature that is left out of this version is the ability to access a map. This is by far the most infuriating missing feature, since without the map you not only have no idea where you are on the ship, you also have no idea where the people you need to rescue are. The silver lining is that your friend who thought you would be blasting aliens together will have something to do in the form of map making and being your navigator. It's not exactly a substitute, but at least it is a small form of co-op.

One brief side note. When you locate the distressed crew members on the ship, they are simply standing on a heating grate waving at you. Now, I realize that space is cold and all, but if your ship was taken over by aliens, chances are you wouldn't be standing around in a room filled with the very things that took over your ship. Plus, the aliens not only ignore the crew members, but they can walk right through them, begging the question "if you people are immune to these things then why the heck am I here risking my life to save your sorry butts?". On the plus side though, it is good to see that stupid people have survived long enough to enjoy intergalactic space travel.

While the Master System isn't horrible, a version of Alien Syndrome was released for the NES in 1988 that is vastly superior. Not only does it bring back the map feature, it also has co-op play as well. If you have a choice in your 8-bit console versions, go with the NES.



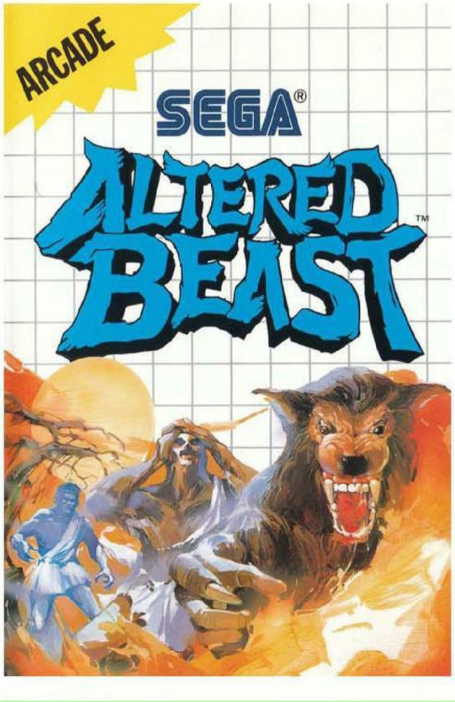
ALTERED BEAST

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1

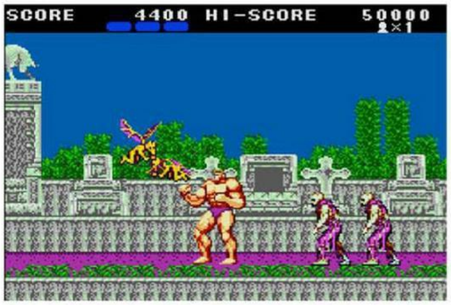
ALTERED
BEAST

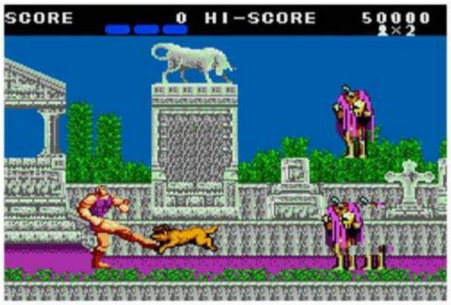
This is a port of the classic arcade game. OK, maybe not classic, but definitely memorable arcade game.

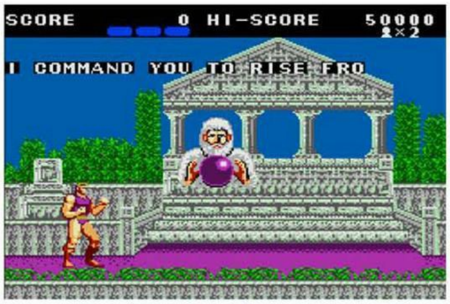

ARCADE
SEGA
ALTERED BEAST

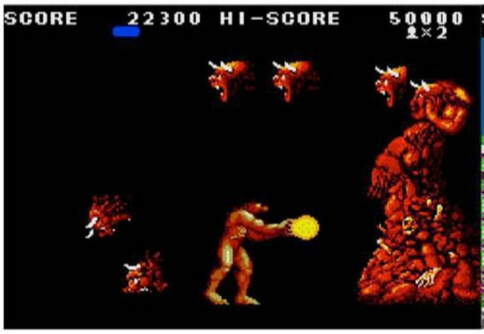
Basically you are a fallen warrior who is commanded by Zeus to rise from your grave in order to go on a quest to save Athena. In order to aid you on your quest, you have the ability to pick up floating balls of steroids...err...powerups which will make you stronger, then eventually turn you into a powerful were-creature. These range from were-wolf to were-dragon to were-bear. Oh, scratch the were-bear because apparently he nor his stage were worthy enough to make this version of the game. Sadly that is just the tip of the iceberg of the problems in this version of Altered Beast.

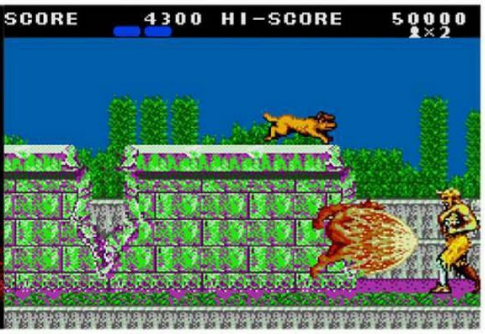
Thanks to massive slowdown and choppiness the game is virtually unplayable. It's almost like you are watching an early episode of South Park where the characters are only animated every other frame. Choppiness would be excusable if it wasn't for the fact that the enemies seem to move just fine, which means they can destroy you with ease. Speaking of enemies, they are just way, way too powerful for you to realistically stand a chance. Sure they only take a single bar of health off with each hit, but they are able to essentially nest inside of you and constantly deliver damage while being immune from your attacks (since it never dawned on the designers that in order to survive you might have to punch yourself in the face). If you are fortunate enough to be knocked back by an enemy you still don't stand much of a chance since other enemies will begin juggling you with their comrades.





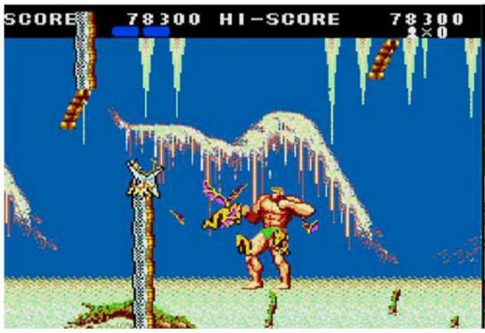


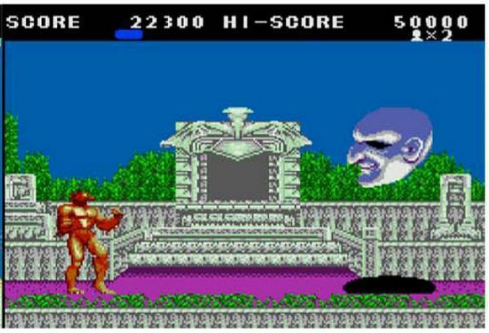


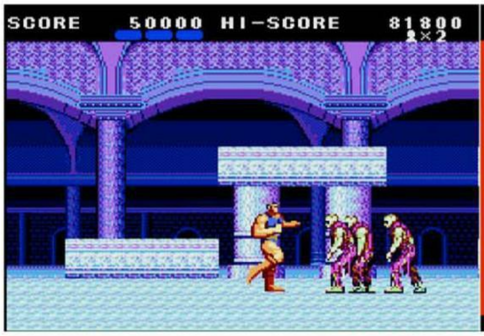


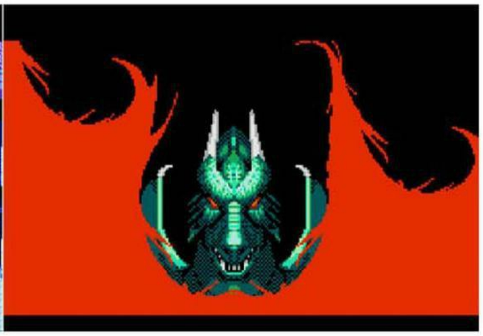
(Side Note: OK, something is amiss here. You are so powerful that when you punch an enemy, any enemy, they shatter into a thousand pieces. OK, I'm exaggerating, they shatter into tens of pieces, it is an 8-bit game after all. Yet despite your immense power, you are seriously damaged whenever anything touches you. I understand getting hurt when a demon bigger than you punches you in the head, but when the toe of a small winged demon touches your shoulder? Fists of stone, body of glass?)

In addition to the missing were-bear level, there are some other noticeable differences between this version and the Arcade/Genesis version. You already start moderately powered up, so you only have to find two steroid powerups in order to transform instead of the normal three. The only way to continue is to know a secret code and the precise moment with which to input it. But without a doubt the single worst offense here is the fact that thanks to the lack of Master System power, you are robbed of hearing Zeus say "Rise From Your Grave". I mean seriously, how can you have Altered Beast without hearing Zeus say that?





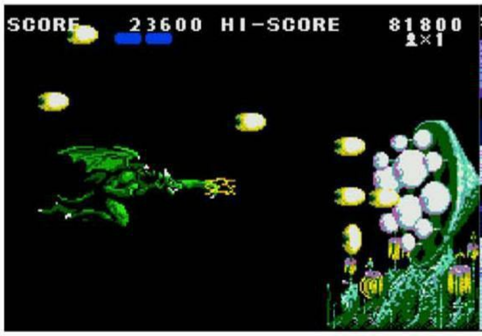


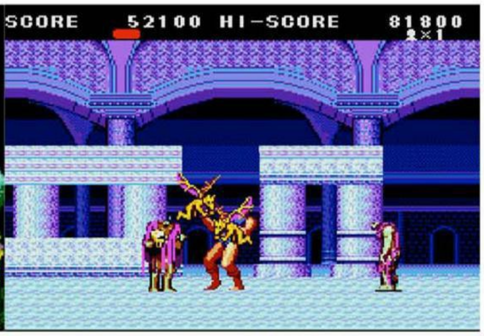


The lone bright spot is that the boss design is straight out of a nightmare. The first boss is a giant creature built out of the bones of the dead who rips clones of his own screaming head off and throws them across the landscape allowing them to rain down upon you. And the second boss is made up entirely of eyes. While that one may not cause nightmares, it will freak you the heck out. Unless you are an optometrist, in which case all you will see is dollar signs.

There are other issues with the game, ranging from the fact that as soon as you become the Altered Beast you face off with the boss (thereby taking away the fun of punishing the normal run of the mill enemies), to the fact that the game just isn't fun to play. It's slow, it's dull, and there is no two player support, so you are on your own.

Given that the game was packaged in with every Genesis system, the only people who should have ever been forced to play this version are the poor unfortunate kids who asked for a Genesis for Christmas, but instead got this game for the Master System because their parents didn't see the point in spending two hundred bucks on a new system that would play the "same games" as the old system.

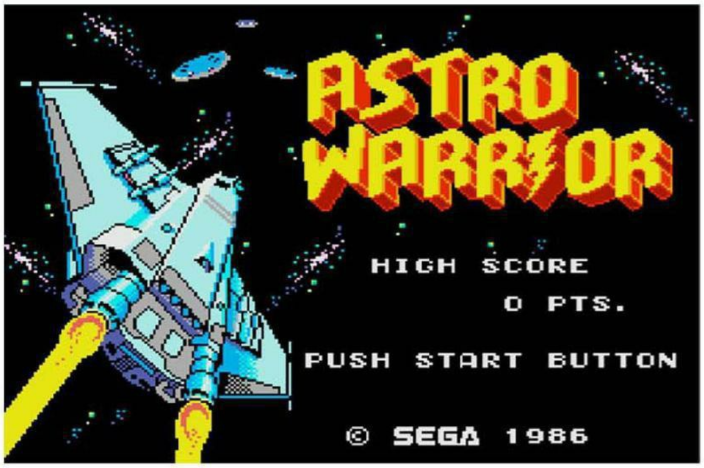




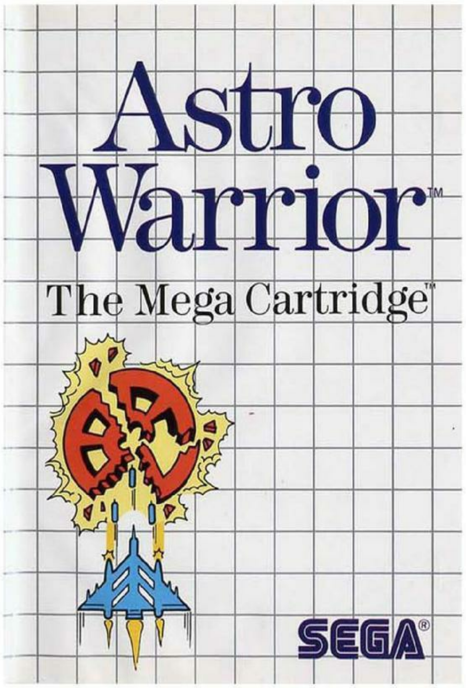
ASTRO WARRIOR

Release Date: 1986
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Shmup
Players: 1

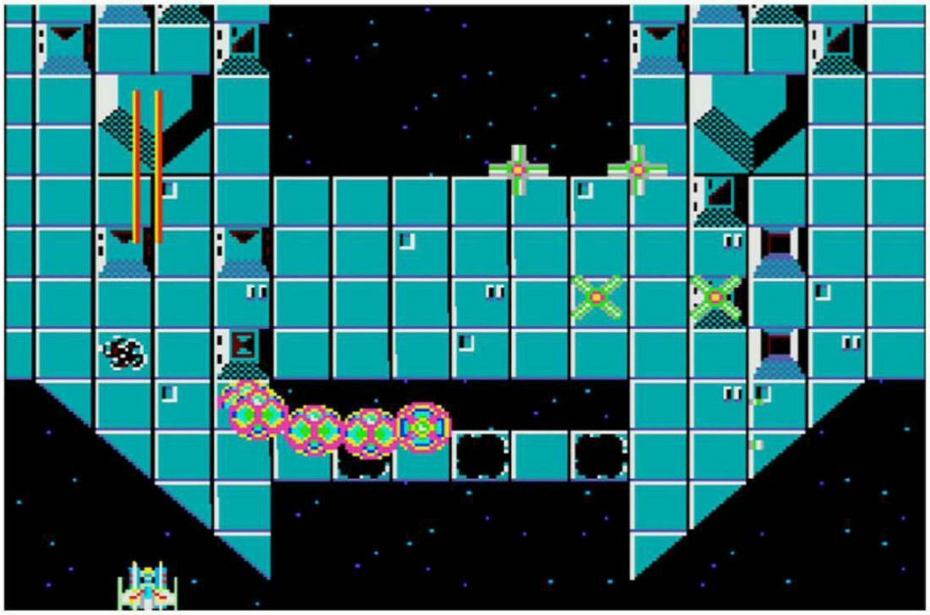

ASTRO WARRIOR
HIGH SCORE
0 PTS.
PUSH START BUTTON
© SEGA 1986

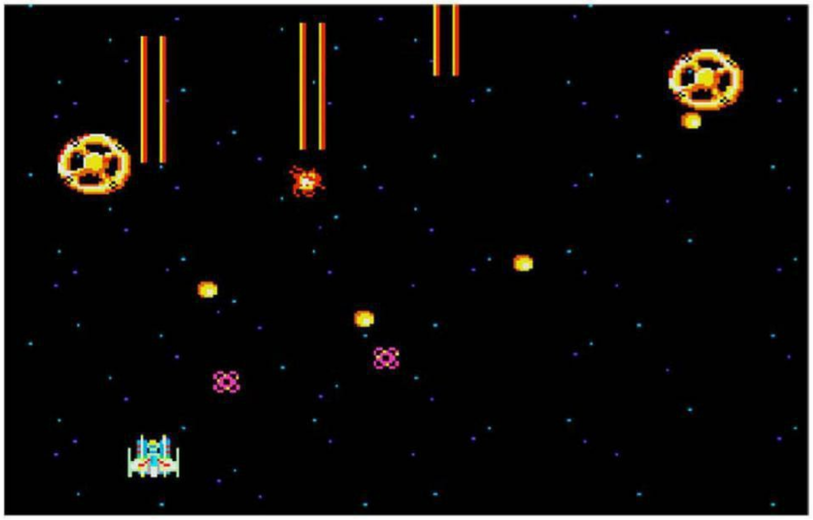
This is a good old fashioned vertical shooter.


Astro Warrior™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

There is no story, and no real purpose other than to destroy everything that moves, and just to be safe, to destroy everything that doesn't move in an effort to ensure it doesn't start moving.

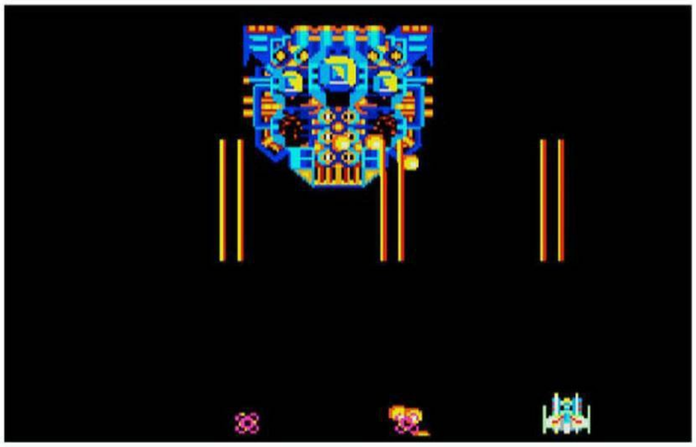
Given that this game was among the first releases on the Master System, it is understandable that the game plays more like an arcade quarter muncher rather than a fleshed out console game. There are just three levels that run in a continual loop, and the levels are nothing more than an incredibly basic collection of moving and stationary targets that are in need of blowing up. The enemies aren't even that interesting, and in some cases look like they are straight out of an Atari 2600 game. Also, I'm not entirely sure what the enemy strategy is, but nobody fires a shot at you until you reach the end of the first level, which means that for 1/3rd of the game, nobody is shooting at you. This doesn't mean that the first level is easy, it isn't. Well, until you get the full set of powerups that basically turn you into a space god.

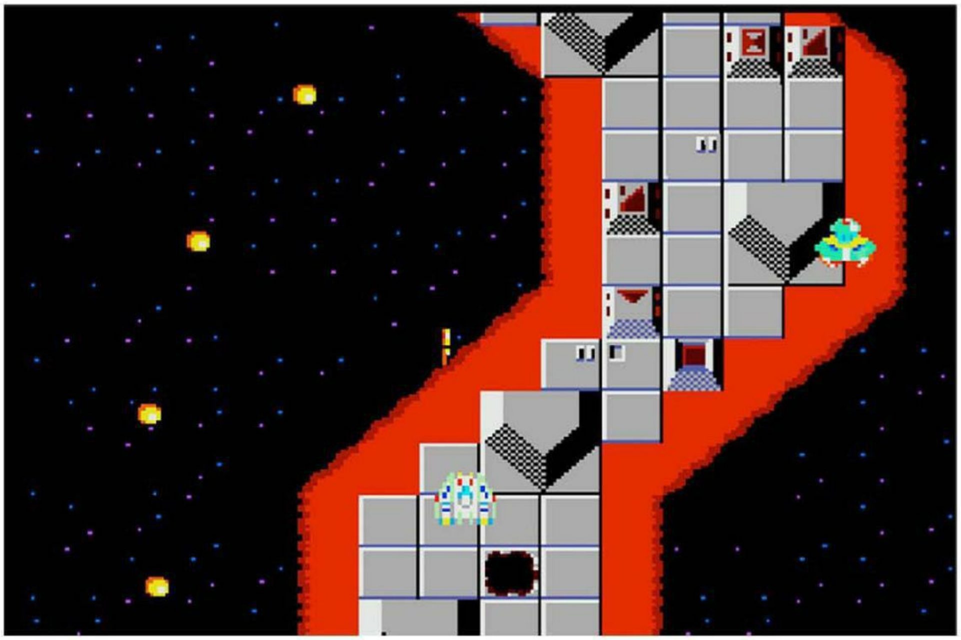




The bosses are pretty basic, as they are just larger ships with more guns. For the most part the patterns are predictable and they can easily be taken out. That said, you can occasionally find yourself trapped in the corner by their pattern, at which time the question of whether or not you are going to die has already been answered, the only question is when. Once you defeat the third and final boss you are rewarded with a trip right back to the beginning of the first level to do it all again.

(Side Note: Depending on which version of the game you are playing the levels may or may not continue forever. If you have the standalone version the game goes to infinity and beyond, but if you have the multi-cart version the game will end after you defeat the final boss for the third time.)





Unlike most games in this genre, powerups don't need to be found hiding in enemies or in specially marked containers, rather they simply fall from the sky after you hit a certain number of tiles. It is a little curious as to why the enemy would be willing to give you a bigger and better weapon that will make destroying their empire easier as a reward to destroying a small portion of their empire, but hey, these are the same guys who think it's a good idea to not shoot at you as you, so who knows what they are thinking.

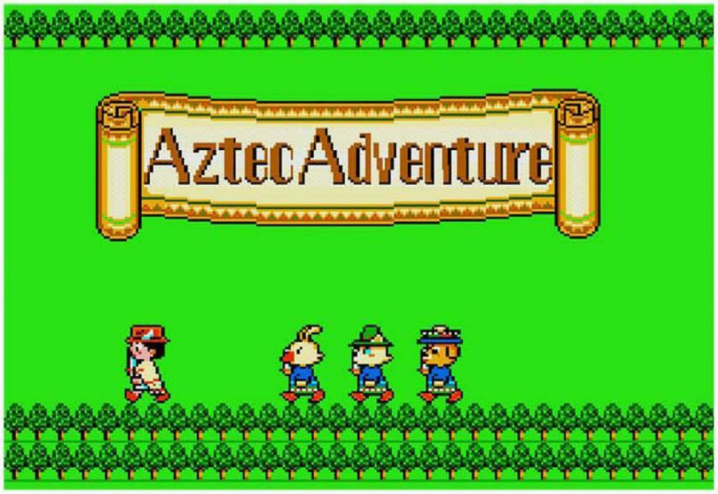
The new and improved weapons aren't anything special, just the usual collection of extra bullets, lasers, and an extra floating turret to help you mow down more enemies. And of course, just like every other scrolling shooter ever made, when you die you lose all of your powerups, which makes it incredibly difficult to regroup when you go from a multi-laser firing madman to just having a single pea shooter.

And really, there's not much more than can be said about Astro Warrior. Seriously, in the time it took you to read this you could have played through the entire game.

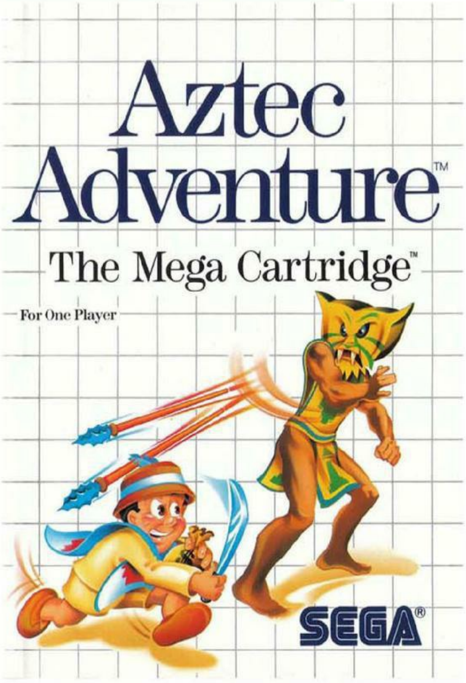
AZTEC ADVENTURE

Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1

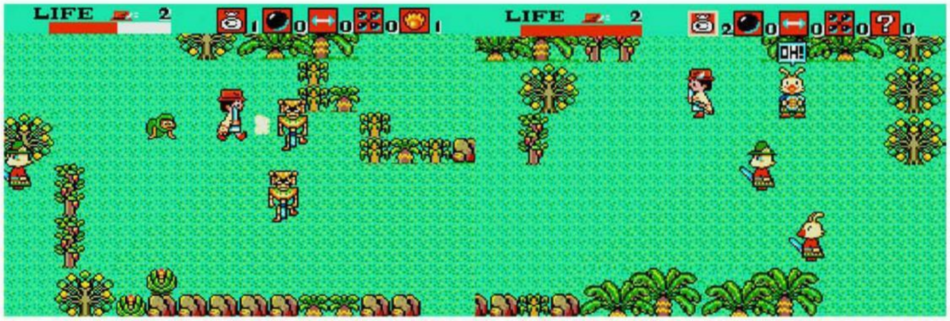

Aztec Adventure

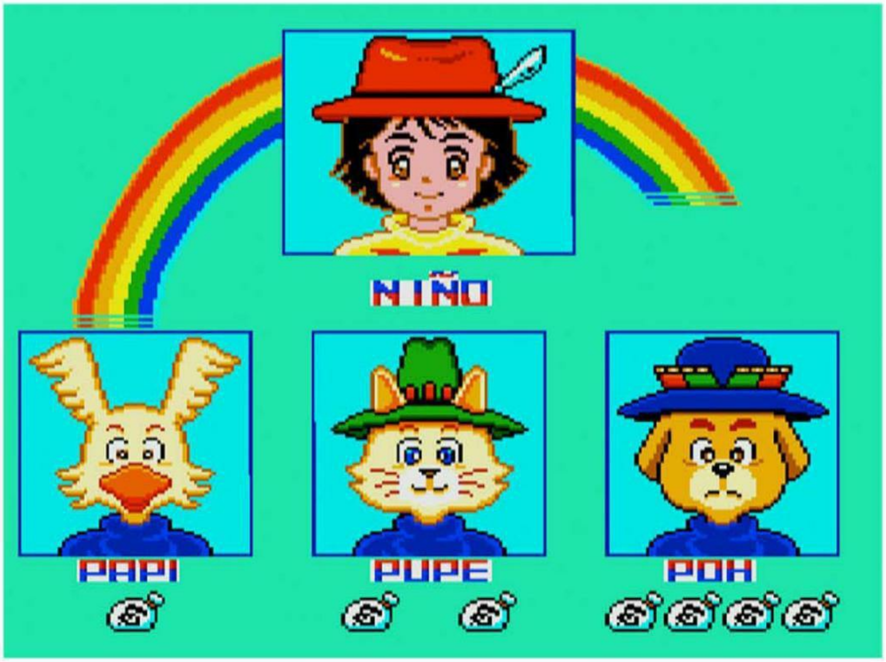
This is a rather poor example of what an arcade style action game is.


Aztec Adventure™
The Mega Cartridge™
For One Player
SEGA®

You control a slow moving adventurer who is searching for the Aztec Paradise. Why he is searching for a Paradise of a Civilization that went extinct thousands of year ago remain a mystery, and given how bad this game is, it will continue to remain that way.

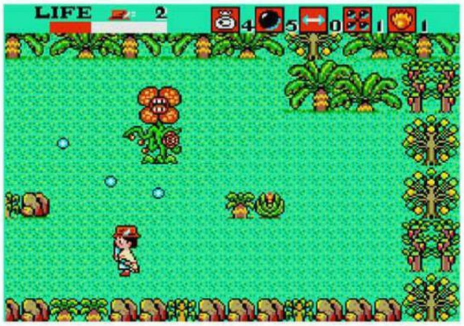
There are ten levels of action that take you from the forest to the desert to random caves. Every stage is set up the same, you have a start place, and end place, and despite the maze like appearance, there is just a linear path to to various bosses you must defeat. The enemies are rather lackluster and are based around the environment they are found in. For example, if you are in the forest, you fight a lot of plants and forest creatures. If you are in the desert, you fight desert creatures.

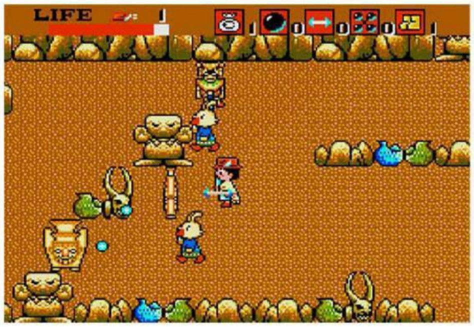


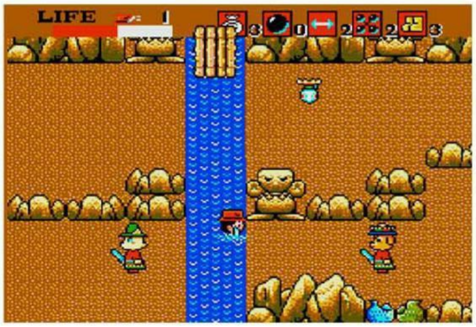


The bosses range from tedious to downright impossible. The first level boss is a stationary plant that fires a triple shot at you, pauses, then fires again. The boss will continue to fire at the same deliberate pace and with the same bullet path until you defeat it, which sadly takes roughly 25 hits. Now that wouldn't be so bad if you could run up and hit it a few times and run back to safety, but thanks to the fact that every hit gives him a few seconds of invulnerability, you have to hit, run away and wait, then go back for another slash. The second boss, a giant cave bat, is the exact opposite in that it will move at the speed of light in an erratic pattern. Sadly it does have the few moments of invulnerability after each hit, which is a problem since it will certainly hit you every time you land a blow. I would tell you how many hits it takes, but I honestly don't know since I never survived past the fourth hit. To pour salt in the wound, if you die while fighting a boss you have to go back to the very beginning of the level.

The one unique thing about this game is the option to bribe some enemies into fighting alongside you. There are three different enemies roaming around that you can toss money bags at, and if you give them enough they will rejoice and start fighting. Sadly though, the AI is on par with a distracted two year old, so this good idea goes to waste pretty quickly as your newly bribed partner will either get stuck behind a wall, or run head first into an enemy and die.

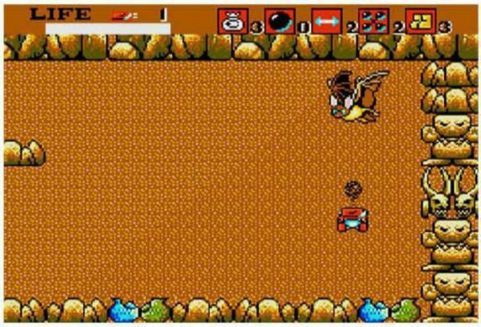


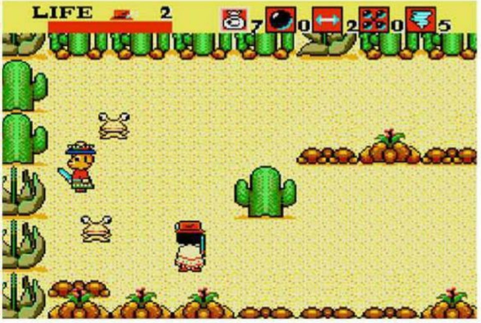




There are the usual assortment of special weapons. In addition to your sword you can pick up iron balls, fireballs, and boots that allow you to cross streams. In the case of fireballs and boots, they are there to allow passage through roadblocks, which means if you come up against one without the proper special weapon, good luck.

The game is one of the more difficult of the 8-Bit era. Granted that has more to do with the fact your character is so slow and the enemies are so fast, and that when you die you have to start the level all over again. There is nothing more frustrating than making it through the vast majority of a level only to die and have to spend several minutes slowly crawling your way back. Bottom line, if you make it past the first level, kudos to you, because you just might be the only one.

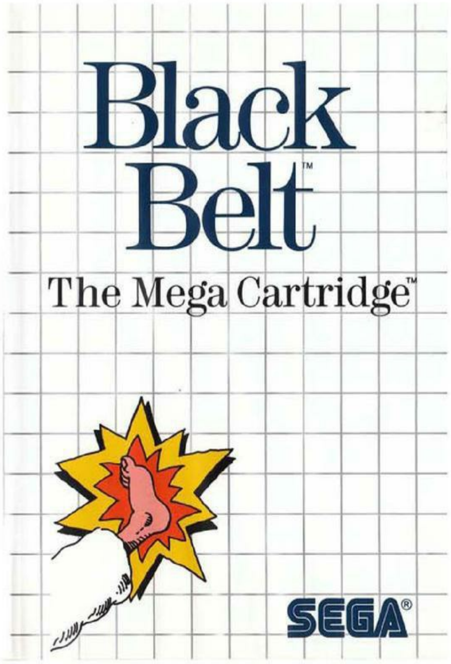




BLACK BELT

Release Date: 1986
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1

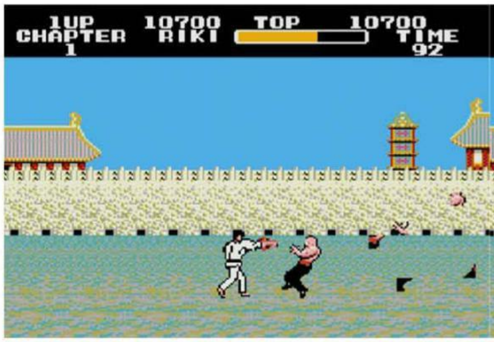

Black
Belt™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

Black Belt is the Master Systems answer to Kung Fu for the NES.

Amazingly enough, even though Kung Fu is regarded as a classic, Black Belt surpasses it in virtually every way. Everything from the variety of enemies, a never ending stream of mini-bosses, as well as end of level boss fights make this the true classic from the 8-bit era.

The premise of the game is pretty basic. You are a kung-fu master who must walk from left to right punching and kicking anyone and everyone who gets in your way. The levels all play out the same way as you fight an endless wave of henchmen while occasionally pausing to take on a unique mini-boss. After enduring that you face off against the big boss, and assuming you survive that encounter you are off to the next stage.

During each level there are a handful of items that will fly across the top of the screen which can help you on your quest to kill all living things. The Japanese symbol gives you a temporary invincibility, while the flying sushi will replenish your health (mmm...flying food....). These are nice powerups during the first couple of levels, but are absolutely necessary if you want to survive the later levels.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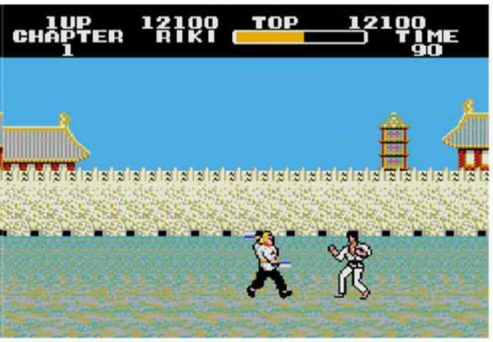
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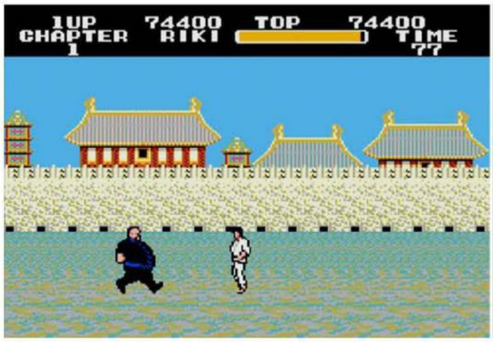
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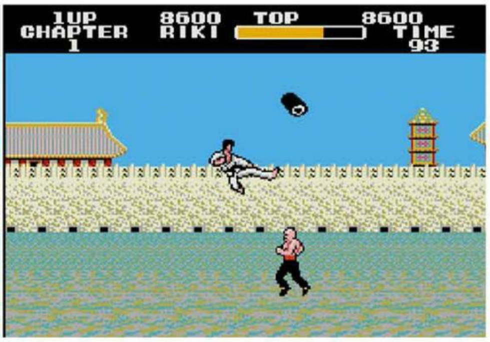
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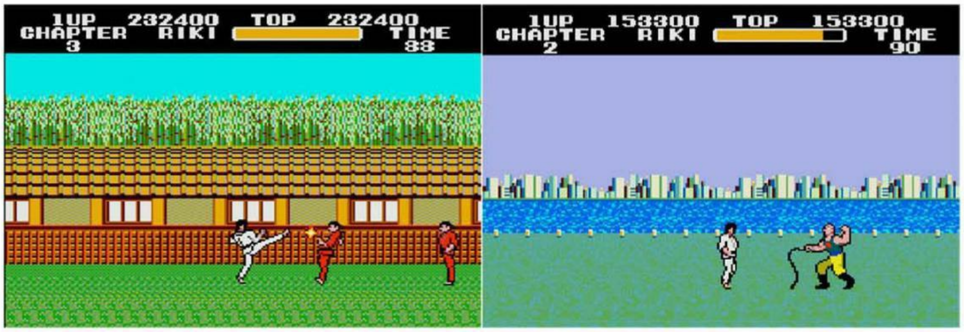
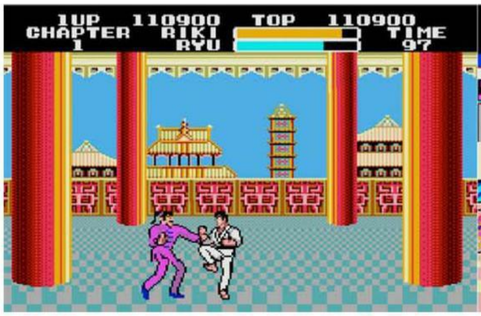
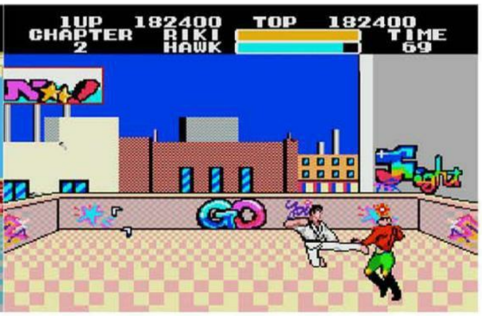


Every level has a unique setting (mostly far east locales like Shaolin temples and ninja camps), and they are populated exclusively by a single type of unique enemy. At the ninja camp you face off against, you guessed it, ninjas. At the Shaolin Temple however you face off against what looks like stereotypical 1920's weightlifters. The mini-bosses on these levels are also tied to the scenery, and these can range from ninja masters to weapon specialists fighting you with claws, staffs, and swords. For some reason however the second level takes you to what looks like New York City, and you are forced to face off against extras from The Road Warrior, as well as a lion tamer min-boss. Given the rest of the locales this level feels a bit out of place.

At the end of each level you face off against a big boss. The perspective changes a bit when you reach the bosses, as the characters get a little bit bigger, and the game resembles a rudimentary Street Fighter. The enemies all have special moves and patterns that must be figured out in order to defeat them. While this is a nice change of pace, the difficulty is completely uneven. For example the second level gang boss can be taken out in about 4 seconds with a few well placed punches, while the first level kung fu master boss will make you throw the controller in frustration because defeating him requires about 20 well placed jump kicks to the face. To make that first boss battle even more frustrating is the fact it takes about five punches from him to reduce your health to nothing. The other curious thing about these boss battles is that even if you drain your enemy's health to nothing, the only way to finish them off is to hit them with a standing punch or kick. If you try and jump kick them they will brush it off and continue to smack you around. The one benefit of ending the fight with a punch or kick is that your character gets his (and your) frustrations out by unleashing a devastating series of blows to the boss before they fly back and burst into a hundred pieces.

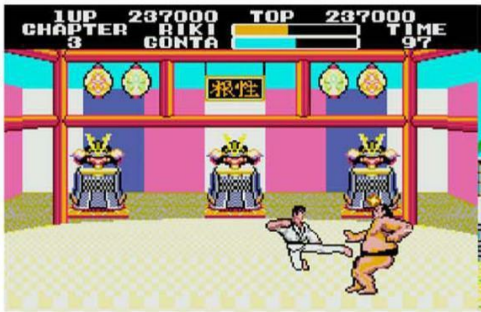

1UP 110900
TOP 110900
CHAPTER 1
RIKI
RYU
TIME 97

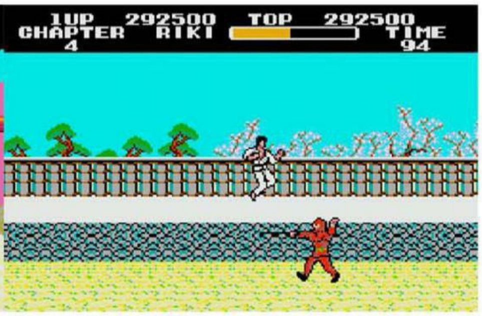

1UP 182400
TOP 182400
CHAPTER 2
RIKI
HAWK
TIME 69
GO

Now for those of you who played Last Battle on the Genesis, you may notice that the way the bosses are finished off in Black Belt is virtually identical. The reason for that is that both Last Battle and Black Belt are reskinned versions of Fist of the North Star games that were released in Japan. It remains to be seen if the change was made because of copyright concerns, lack of knowledge of the series in the US, or the gratuitous violence that the anime series is known for.

There are some issues with the game however, but they aren't too major. The biggest problem is the collision detection, which can be spotty at times. During the main level if there are two enemies who are overlapping you have to punch the same spot twice since the first punch will only take out one bad guy. This is a problem, especially in the later levels when enemies are flooding the screen, because no matter how quick your reflexes are, you will always take damage. The collision detection is also a problem during the main boss battles since you have to hit them in the exact right spot to inflict damage. Fortunately though the bosses are hampered with the same issue, so it still remains a fair fight.

Minor issues aside, this is without a doubt this is one of the most solid games in the Master System lineup, and is a great example of early 8-bit arcade style action games.

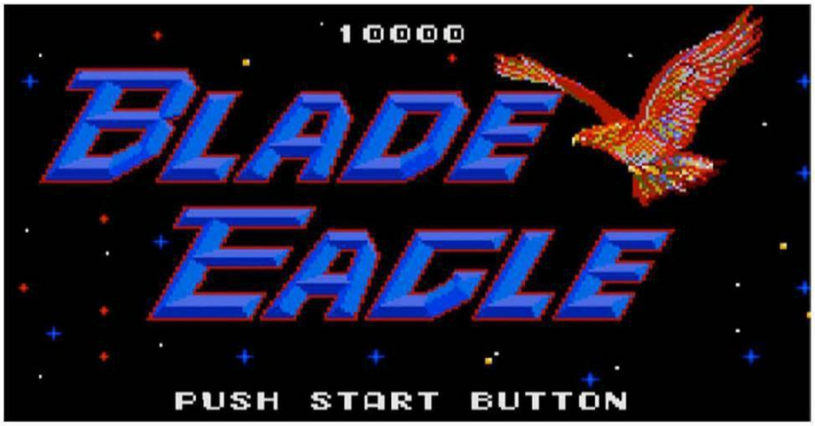

1UP 237000
TOP 237000
CHAPTER 3
RIKI
GONTA
TIME 97
根性


1UP 292500
TOP 292500
CHAPTER 4
RIKI
TIME 94

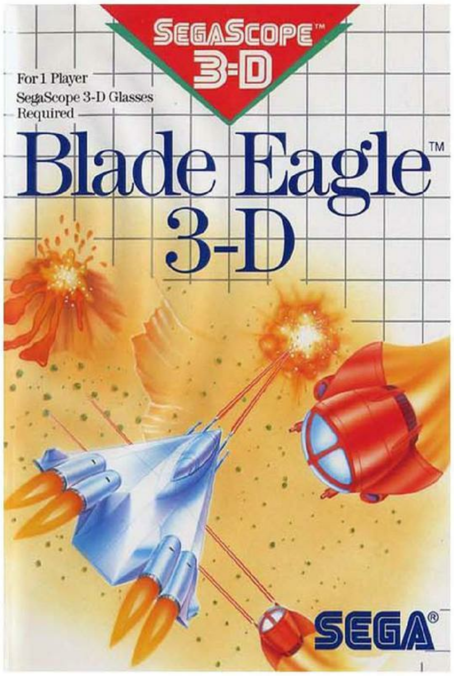
BLADE EAGLE 3-D

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Shmup
Players: 1


10000
BLADE EAGLE
PUSH START BUTTON

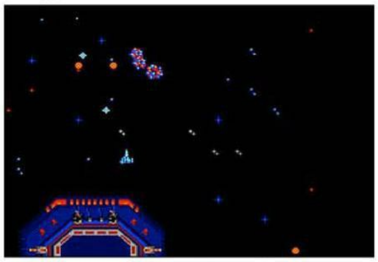
This is one of only six games that take advantage of the expensive 3-D glasses peripheral.

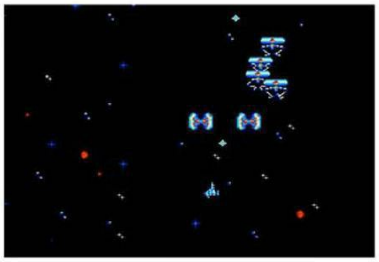

SEGASCOPE™ 3-D
For 1 Player
SegaScope 3-D Glasses Required
Blade Eagle™
3-D
SEGA®

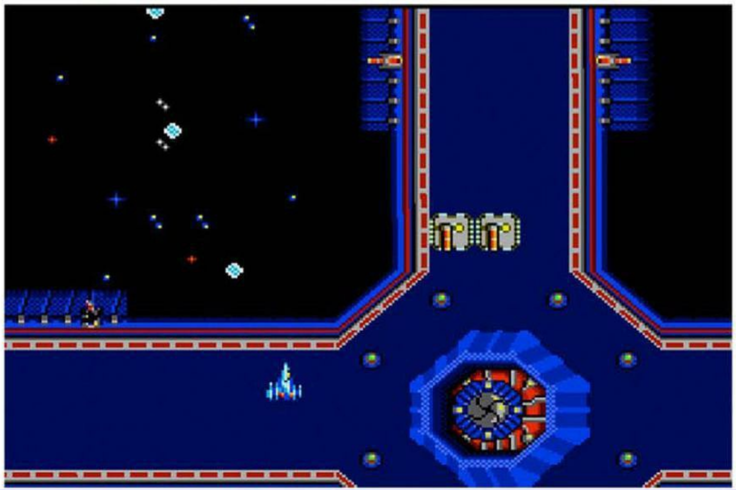
If you don't have access to a working pair of the glasses (as well as an original console, a physical copy of this fairly rare game, and an old school TV) the game is virtually impossible to play. Sadly, even with the 3-D glasses the game is still virtually impossible to play.

Blade Eagle 3-D is really nothing more than your standard nine level shump. Really, if you have played a game from this era in this genre you will see a lot of familiar things. There are plenty of things to shoot, plenty of things taking shots at you, and of course the ever popular generic powerups. You get lasers, extra bullets, and can even get an extra floating helper to join your fight against whatever galactic empire is wreaking havoc this time around.

Amazingly enough there is a bit of uniqueness to be found here. By pressing your non-fire button your ship will move to a different dimensional plane. Now if this had been done in a game with an isometric view (i.e. Zaxxon) this could have been a tremendous feature and could have added an incredible, wait for it, dimension to the game (yeah, I went there). However, because the view here is top down rather than isometric the ability to move to a different plane is nothing more than an exercise in frustration.

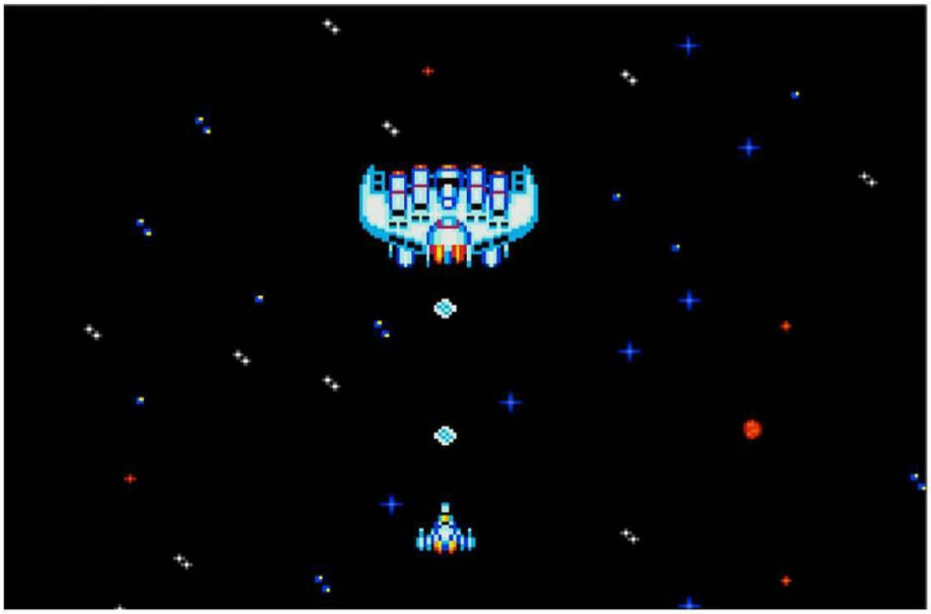






It is incredibly difficult to tell which of the three levels your enemies are on, which will lead to you lining up a shot only to have your bullets fly over their heads. While this is happening the other enemy ship that you were ignoring because you were too busy missing your other shot now has you perfectly lined up in their sights. If this wasn't bad enough, if you happen to be flying too low you can expect to be reduced to flaming rubble as you will inevitably ram into a tower or other inanimate object. Oh, and if you think you can avoid that by just staying on the top two planes, guess again, since every button press cycles you through the different levels, so rather than having the control to drop down a level when need be you will send your space fighter into a nosedive to the lowest rung, and quite possibly into the side of a building.

To be blunt, this game had a lot of potential, however as is it isn't the greatest game in the world. However, if you shelled out the money for the nifty 3-D glasses and were looking for a game to use them with, you were kind of stuck with Blade Eagle since it represented nearly 17% of the games that were compatible with them.

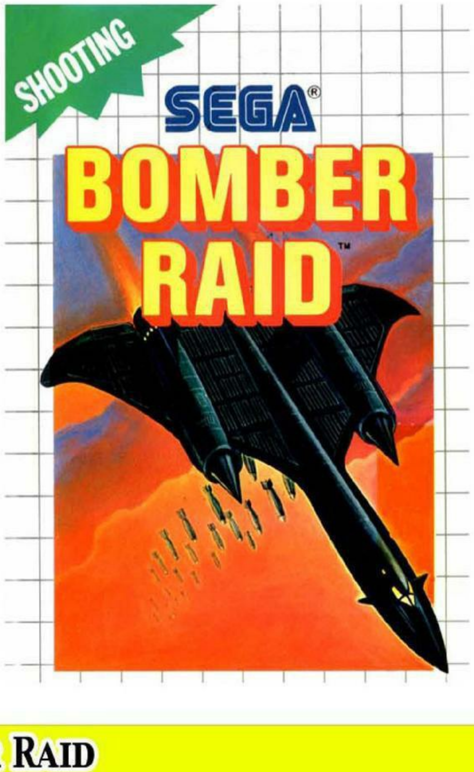


BOMBER RAID

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sanritsu
Publisher: Activision

Genre: Shmup
Players: 1

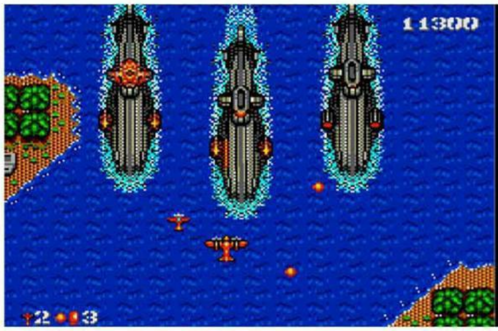
BOMBER RAID

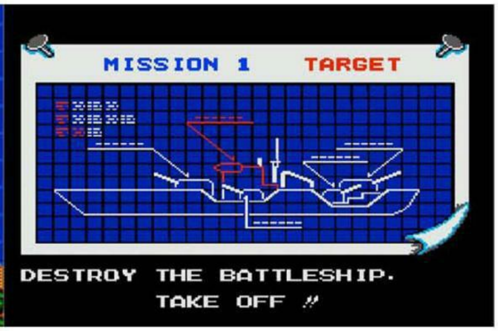

SHOOTING
SEGA
BOMBER
RAID

This is one of the best examples of 8-Bit scrolling shooters on the Master System.

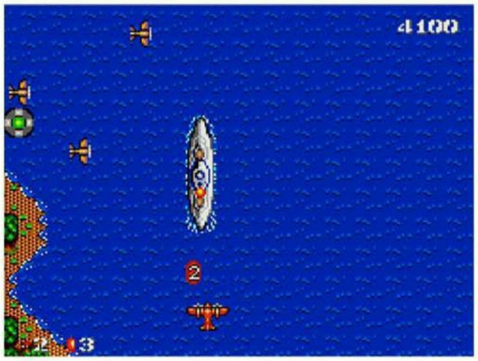
You are a lone pilot armed with only a limitless supply of machine gun bullets and a handful of cluster bombs, sent on a mission to destroy the enemy. Why they couldn't send an armada to help you out is never answered, and really, is it ever in these games? For those of you who played the arcade classic 1942 you'll be right at home here as Bomber Raid looks like 1942's first cousin.

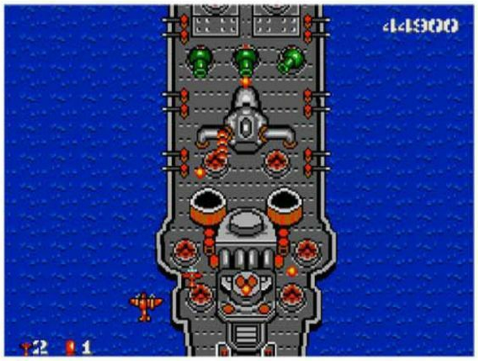
The story is about as deep as you'd expect a game like this to be. You start the level with some mysterious unseen commander giving you an order to destroy some gigantic enemy weapon. And really, that's about it in terms of story.





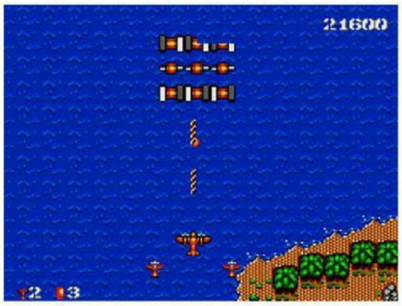
DESTROY THE BATTLESHIP.
TAKE OFF !!

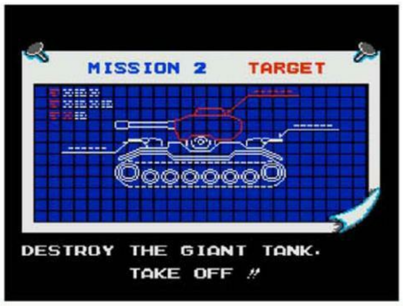




Unlike virtually every single game in this genre, there are no true powerups here. Sure you have special canisters to shoot that release something with an object that is labeled as a powerup, but unless you have a very keen eye you will never notice a difference. There are multiple levels of these powerups that slowly turn your machine gun into a rigatoni shooter, which somehow makes it more powerful. Sure the bullets hit much harder, but those bullets continue to fly in a very straight and narrow line. The other powerup that adds to your arsenal gives you a wingman to help you pick off the enemy fighters.

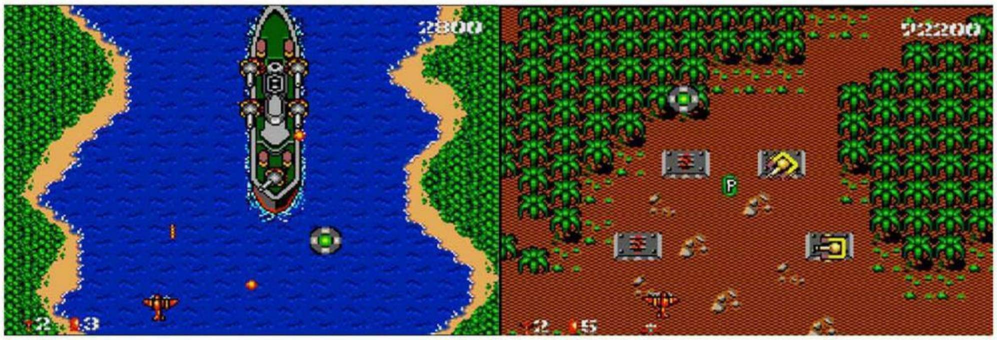
There are a couple of unfortunate things about your wingmen. For starters their weapons can't be powered up, which means that they have all the effectiveness of a spitball against most of the enemies. The other thing that is sure to cause you a massive amount of frustration is that when the wingman powerup appears you have to shoot it until it displays the number that corresponds with the location you want them to be at. There are four positions, most of which causes your buddies to shoot behind you or to the side which is absolutely no help to you, so in order to get something useful they have to be at position one or two. Now these powerup icons are roughly the same size as your bullet stream, which requires you to essentially thread a needle while being under heavy fire from the enemy, all so you can get a couple of useless wingmen.




MISSION 2 TARGET

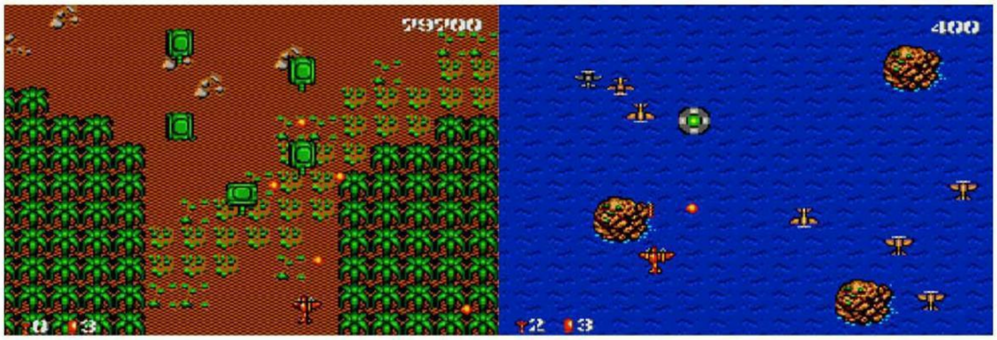
DESTROY THE GIANT TANK.

TAKE OFF !!



The stages are pretty basic in their setup. Basically you fly north while destroying everything in sight, occasionally coming across a mini-boss type battle where a bunch of normal enemies (like tanks or jets) ambush you. These battles are actually quite tough because they fire at such a high rate and there are enough of them to fill the screen with death. The boss battles aren't much better, as there are bullets flying everywhere. Often times in these battles you'll have to go into shootout mode, where you hide in a safe spot and then quickly move over, fire a few shots, then go back to hiding. Or if you've saved up your cluster bombs you can just unleash them and wipe the boss out.

All in all this is a very solid entry into the genre. There is nothing spectacular here, just solid, satisfying gameplay.



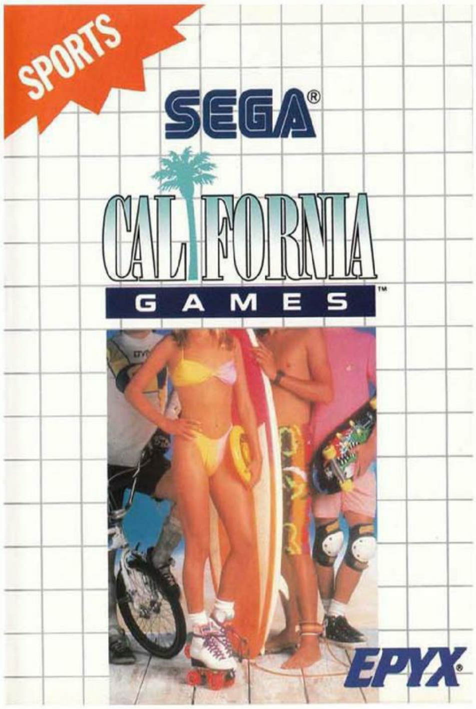
BOMBER RAID

CALIFORNIA GAMES

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Epyx
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Sports - Misc
Players: 1 - 8

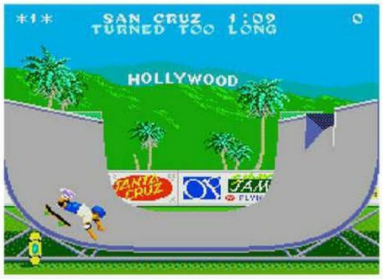
CALIFORNIA
GAMES
®

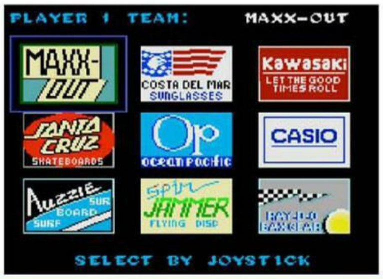

SPORTS
SEGA®
CALIFORNIA
GAMES
EPYX

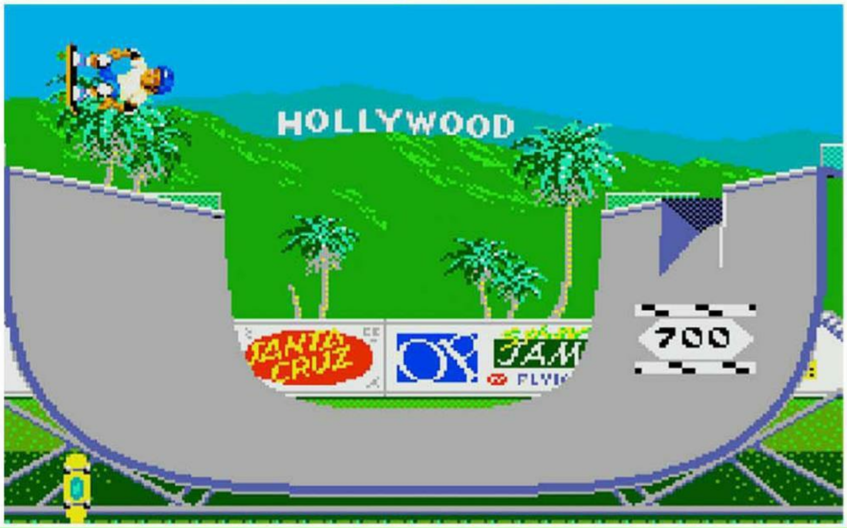
This is a halfway decent random sports collection for the Sega Master System.

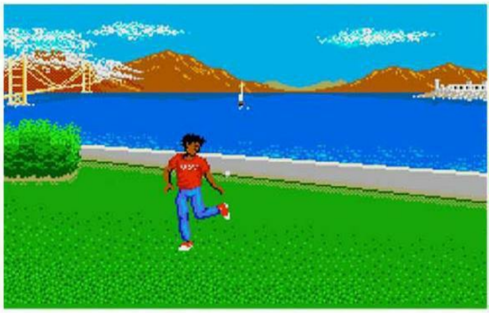
There are six events in which to compete, some good, some bad, some just downright baffling. Upon starting up you get to pick one of eight corporate sponsor teams that include Casio and Ocean Pacific, among others. Then you get to select how many players, which is significant because you can have up to eight people competing at the same time. And by the same time I of course mean by taking turns and passing the controller around the room. But hey, it was the eighties, and just the fact that you could have a game keep track of eight player scores at the same time was quite a feat.

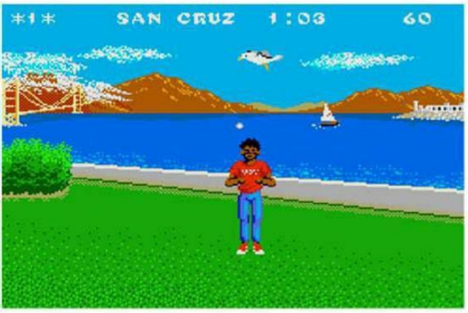
Up first is the half pipe. This is an incredibly difficult event. You have a limited amount of moves you can do, ranging from hand plant to simply turning around in the air. In order to gain momentum you have to push down as you are going down and up as you are starting to go up the wall, and once you reach the top you have to do a perfectly timed button press in order to perform any move. Oh yeah, and you have to release the button at the perfect time as well or you will crash. You have either a minute and a half to complete your run, or like most players, you have a total of three falls. Consider yourself lucky if you score any points at all.


1 SAN CRUZ 1:09 0
TURNED TOO LONG
HOLLYWOOD
SANTA CRUZ
JAM
FLYI


PLAYER 1 TEAM: MAXX-OUT
MAXX-OUT
COSTA DEL MAR SUNGLASSES
Kawasaki LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL
SANTA CRUZ SKATEBOARDS
Op ocean pacific
CASIO
Auzzie BOARD SURF
SPIN JAMMER FLYING DISC
RAY-BAN
SELECT BY JOYSTICK

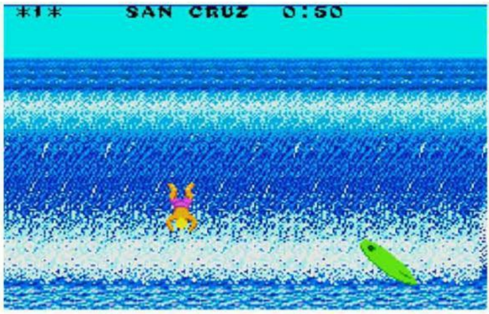

HOLLYWOOD
SANTA CRUZ
JAM
FLYI
700

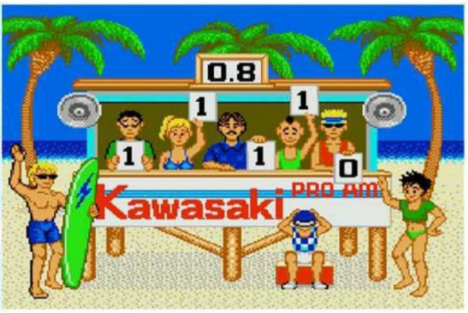


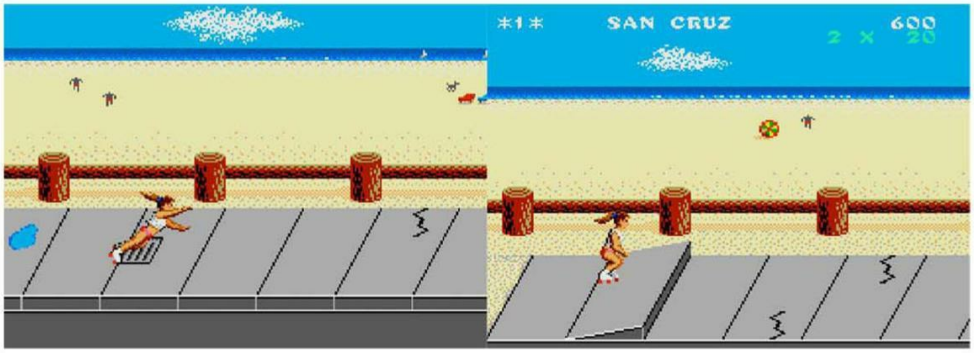


Next is the great hippie pastime, hacky sack. Unfortunately this digital version suffers from real life syndrome, in that it is virtually impossible to kick it more than twice in a row. This is due to the fact that the ball moves slightly to the left or right with every hit, while your character moves in full steps, which is a problem because you have to be perfectly lined up with the ball in order to strike it. In order to build up points however, you can continually hit it with your head while spinning around in circles, and hope you can hit George the seagull for bonus points. And yes, it's about as exciting as it sounds.

In the surfing event you get to ride the worlds largest wave. Seriously, the thing never ends. There really isn't much you can do here except not fall down, or if you are feeling adventurous you can jump off the top of the wave and land it, which apparently isn't impressive enough for the judges, seeing as how you'll rarely score above a four. More often than not you will simply fall over the top of the wave or go straight down into the surf and drown. Either way you'll be counting down until this event ends and you can move on to something a little more exciting.

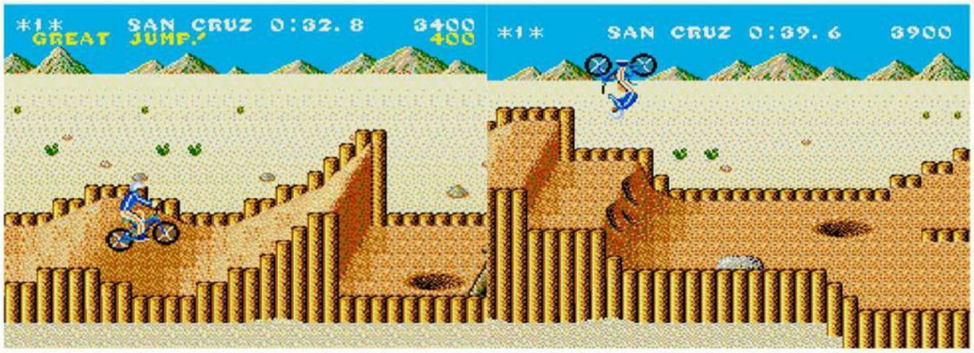


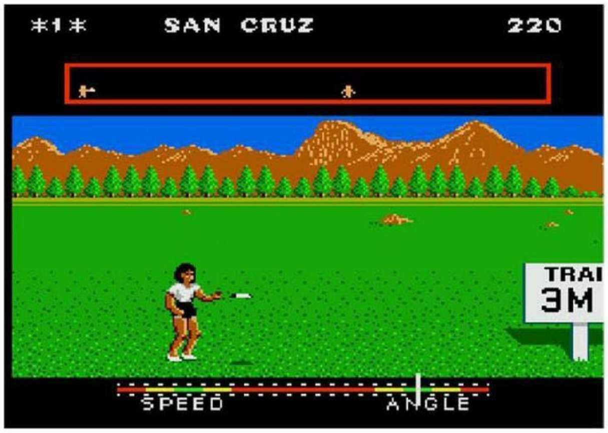




The skating event is probably the worst controls of any game in the history of video games. Basically in order to build up speed you have to alternate between pushing up and down on the controller, which is a problem since you have to spend the entire run dodging obstacles by moving up or down. To compound the problem the skates are susceptible to anything that comes across their path. Beach ball? Crash. Sandy patch? Crash. A blade of grass? Yep, that's a crash. Bottom line, expect to spend a lot of time watching your skater girl throwing a temper tantrum after face planting.

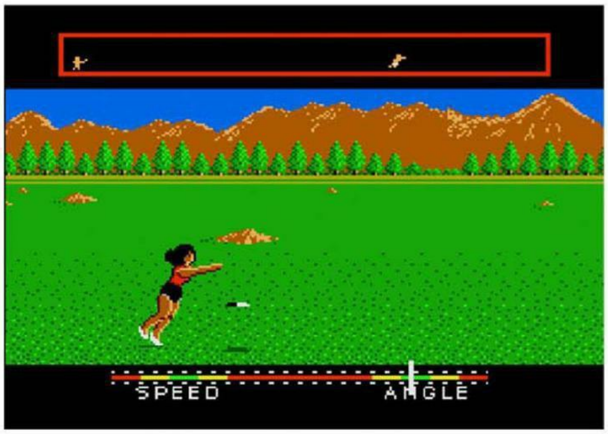
The BMX event is hands down the best event in the entire game. You get to ride on a serious dirt track, filled with jumps and other obstacles. Unlike the other events the controls here actually make sense. You have to hit a button as fast as you can to build up speed, the other button jumps, and you can do modifiers in the air once you launch. Once you get the feel of it you'll be cutting front flips, back flips, and 360's with ease.. You only have the ninety second time limit, but that's plenty of time to rack up quite a score.





The final event is one of the most baffling things I've ever seen in a video game. Basically you throw a frisbee to your friend across the park. That's it. No goals, no obstacles, just playing catch. One would think that a simple game of catch would be, well, simple. To put it mildly it's not. Thanks to it being virtually impossible to position your partner in the right position to catch the frisbee expect to see the disc hit the ground every single time down the course. For an added laugh you can make your partner "leap" for the frisbee. Thanks to the poor animation it looks like they stumbled and fell down on their face rather than acquired grass stains via an athletic move. You get three throws to build your score, and thankfully you get points for distance, however if anyone in the competition accidently catches one they will most like emerge victorious.

The replay value of California Games is fairly low, of course unless beer is involved, in which case the competition meter is filled to a high enough level that even playing catch with a frisbee would be entertaining.



CAPTAIN SILVER

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1

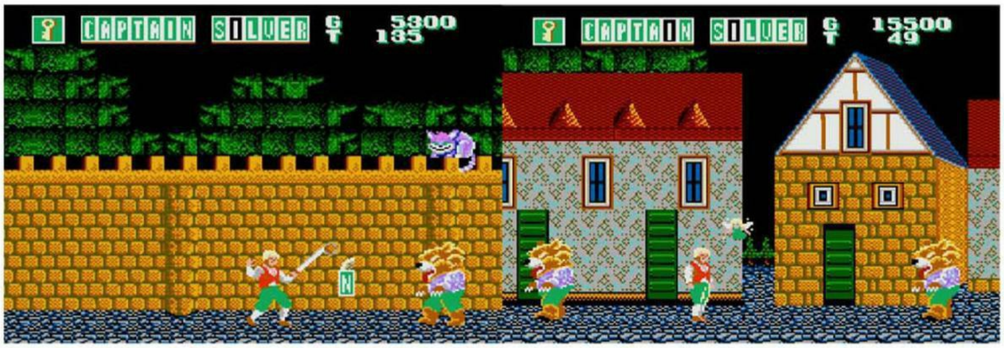
CAPTAIN
SILVER

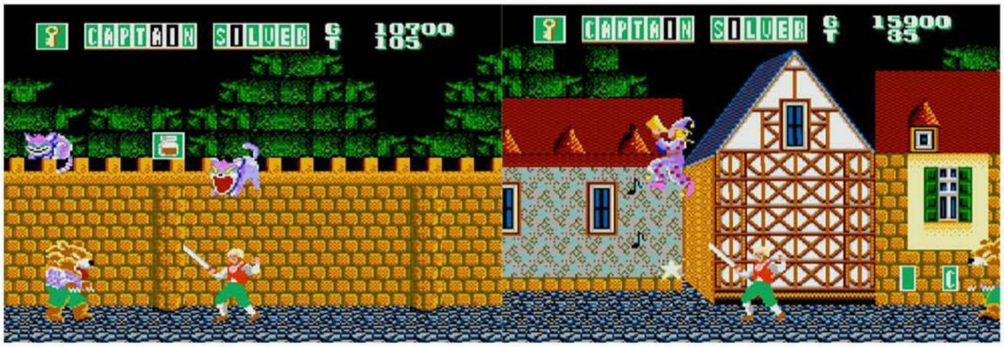
ACTION
SEGA
Captain Silver

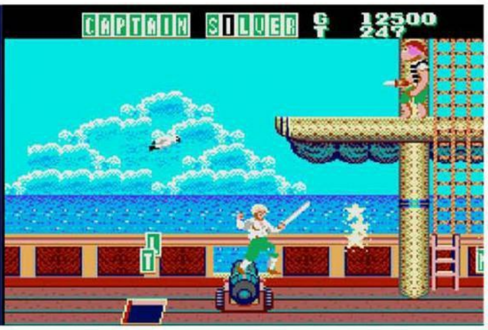
There are very few times in my life I am ever left speechless by a game, this is one of those rare occurrences.

Captain Silver is a port of the 1987 Data East arcade game that puts you in control of the famed Captain Silver, who is billed as the most feared pirate on the seven seas. Your mission is to do pirate stuff, like raiding rival pirate ships to plunder their gold, invading peaceful native islands to kill the indigenous population, and getting into sword fights with college basketball mascots on steroids. Wait, what?

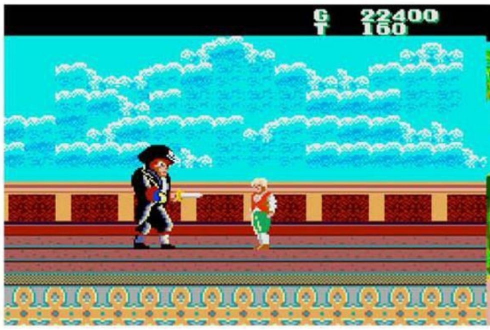
As soon as you hit start you are going to be completely confused as the entire first level feels like a bad pirate LSD trip. There are the aforementioned steroid mascots, as well as killer cheshire cats, killer pumpkins that leap out of trees, and for some reason a flute playing guy that leaps around in PJ's. All in all it is incredibly surreal, and even upon further reflection I can honestly say I have no idea what the heck the designers were thinking. Speaking of questioning the designers, let's look at the hero.

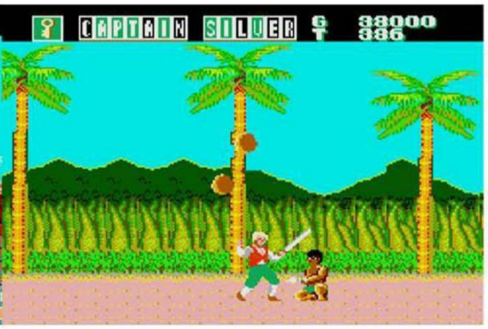


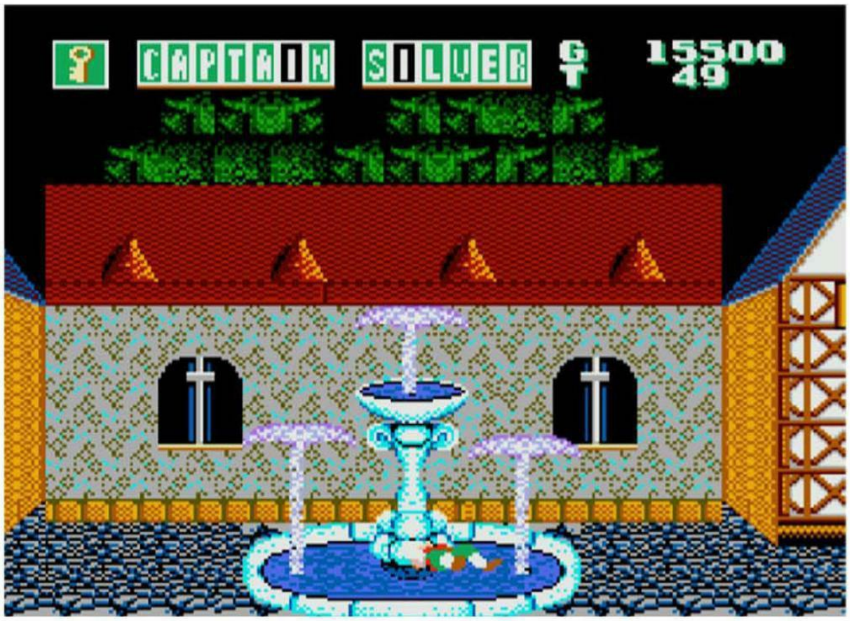




For starters he has got to be the most well dressed pirate in the history of pirates. That alone isn't that bad, but when you consider that his most devastating powerup is a fairy that grants him the ability to shoot fairly stars from the end of his sword you have to wonder how he ever became the most feared pirate on the seven seas. Oh yeah, if he gets multiple fairies he can shoot multiple stars from his sword, and when he jumps he curtseys. Now there's nothing wrong with being polite, but I get the sense that a curtsey jumping fairy star throwing pirate would last all of 15 seconds against a real pirate with a blunderbuss. Luckily the Captain does have a few things going for him. His swordsmanship is very good, giving him the ability to hit things in front of as well as above him. He can get boots that give him the ability to leap really high, which is good since it let's him reach the mason jars full of invincibility giving rum.







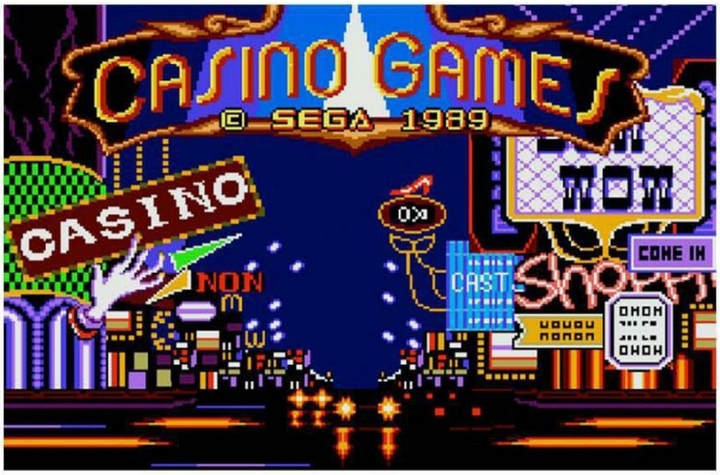
Now there are a few problems present. One would think that the most feared pirate in all the world would be able to take a hit from a bird or a crab, but you'd be wrong. Every single thing in the game gives a one hit death. While it's believable that a spear to the face would cause that, a bird brushing up against your leg isn't. There is also a tough jumping section during the first level that requires you to make a couple of perfectly timed jumps onto water plumes coming from a fountain. While I'm willing to buy the fact that a pirate can walk on water plumes (it is a video game after all), it is a little curious as to why when you miss a jump he dies when he lands in the fountain filled with six inches of water. Apparently the Captain is a bit hydrophobic.

This isn't the worst game in the world, and is actually a pretty decent port of the arcade game. That said, if you have an interest in experiencing the adventures of a hydrophobic fairy star throwing pirate on LSD, you would be best to track down a Japanese or European copy of the game, as the American version is missing some key elements. There are a few enemies and items missing, but more importantly there are two full levels missing from the American version. Two levels doesn't sound like much until you consider the original game was only six levels.

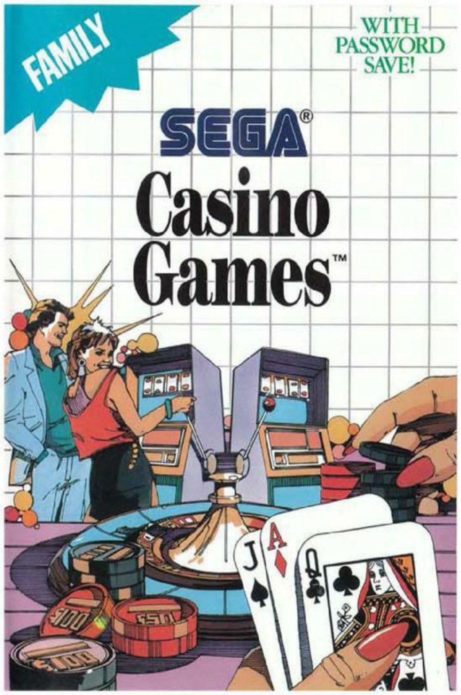
CASINO GAMES

Release Date: 1989
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Card Games
Players: 1


CASINO GAMES
© SEGA 1989
CASINO
COME IN

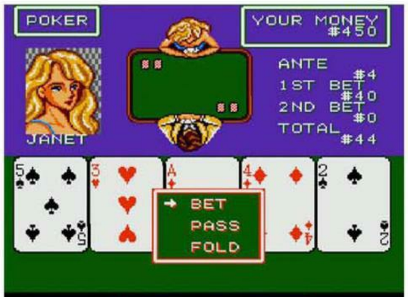
Casino Games gave kids the chance to experience the hustle and bustle of a Vegas casino.

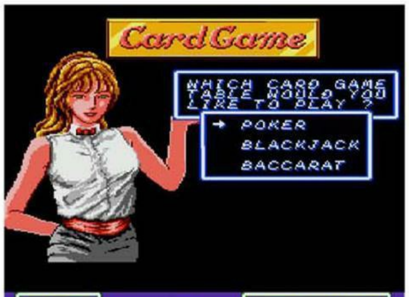

FAMILY
WITH PASSWORD SAVE!
SEGA®
Casino Games™

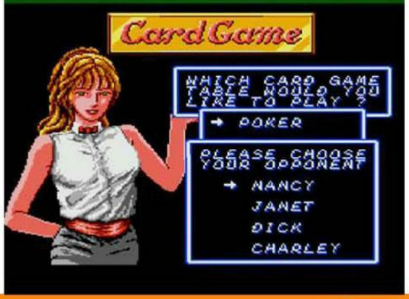
There are beautiful women to greet you, plenty of games to take your money, and a potential fortune to be made. Pretty much the only thing missing is the $2.99 lobster buffet. Within the casino there are three card games, a slot machine and pinball to entertain you.

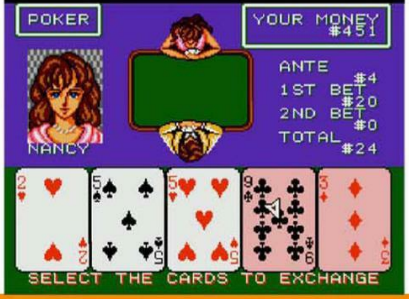
Poker comes in one variety, five card draw. At the start you get to choose your opponent from a list of two women and two men. There's not much difference between them outside of a different picture and what they say at the start. Depending on how much money you have in your bankroll, the ante's and limits change. If you start a new game with a fresh $500, your first hand will be at a much higher limit than you can probably afford. If you aren't careful you can see nearly half of your bankroll vanish in a single hand. Of course if you win you'll be off to a good start.

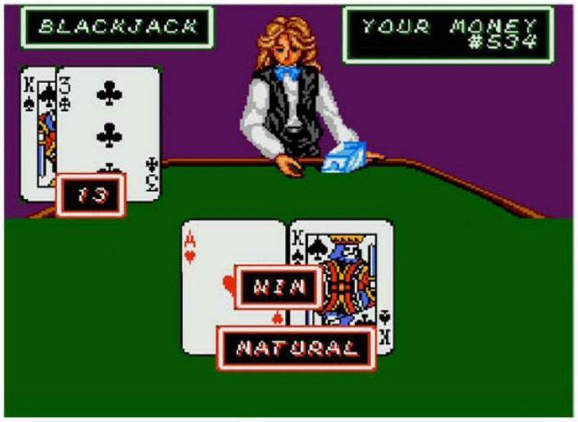
The hand starts out with a betting cycle that give you an opportunity to stand or raise, followed by your opponent being given the same option. This goes on until you both stand or you reach the betting max for that round. After that you get to select the cards you want to discard, which can be confusing since most games have you select the cards you want to keep. Nothing is more frustrating than accidently throwing away a pair of aces so your unsuited 2,7,9 can be preserved intact. After you get your new cards you go through the betting cycle again and then it's time to show your cards. Winner gets the money, the loser begrudgingly tosses in a few chips for the next hands ante.


POKER
YOUR MONEY $450
JANET
ANTE $4
1ST BET $40
2ND BET $0
TOTAL $44
→ BET
PASS
FOLD


Card Game
WHICH CARD GAME TABLE WOULD YOU LIKE TO PLAY ?
→ POKER
BLACKJACK
BACCARAT


Card Game
WHICH CARD GAME TABLE WOULD YOU LIKE TO PLAY ?
→ POKER
PLEASE CHOOSE YOUR OPPONENT
→ NANCY
JANET
DICK
CHARLEY

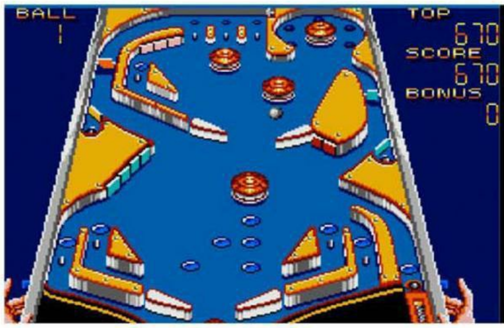

POKER
YOUR MONEY $451
NANCY
ANTE $4
1ST BET $20
2ND BET $0
TOTAL $24
SELECT THE CARDS TO EXCHANGE

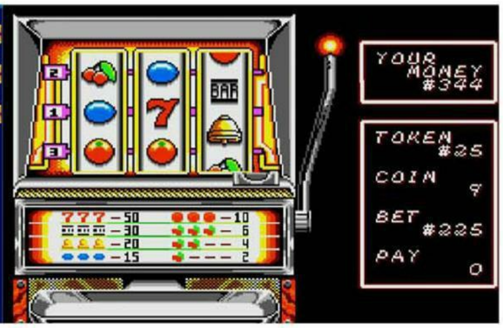


One thing of note, the computer rarely, if ever, bluffs. If you raise a couple of times and they stay in the hand, chances are they have something. If they don't, they typically fold. It doesn't make for the most realistic of poker games, however it's always good to know when you better have a hand.

Up next is Blackjack, and unlike Poker it's just you versus the dealer. The goal of the game is to have the hand that is closest to 21 (and just like the Price Is Right, it's the closest without going over). You decide how much you bet at the start of the hand, you are dealt a couple of cards and get to decide if you want another one or not. If you beat the computer you double your bet, and if you get blackjack (an Ace and a card valued at 10) then you get 1.5 times your bet. If you tie the dealer you get your money back, and if you lose the dealer walks away with your cash. It's pretty basic, but it's still a solid version of blackjack (of course it's kind of hard to screw it up, but I digress).

The final card game is baccarat, made famous by being James Bonds favorite card game and the primary plot device in Casino Royale. What, you don't remember a major baccarat competition in Casino Royale? That's because the producers played baccarat and realized that it is overly complicated, incredibly boring and really nothing more than pure chance, so they made a change from the book and inserted Poker instead of baccarat. The goal of the game is to get a hand closest to 9. Of course if you get a hand above 10 then the 1 is dropped and you are left with whatever the single digit is (i.e. if you have a 13, then your hand is 3). But if you get a 10 then you are forced to draw again. Yeah, like I said, it's a bit complicated and incredibly boring. It's like War, but with more rules.





The final two games available are a slot machine and pinball. The slot machine is, well, a slot machine. If you ever wondered what your seventy year old grandmother did on those weekend trips to Indian Casinos, here is your chance. It's also a great way to develop a serious gambling habit because you'll win a small amount and come so close to hitting it big so many times that you'll tell yourself "OK, just one more spin".

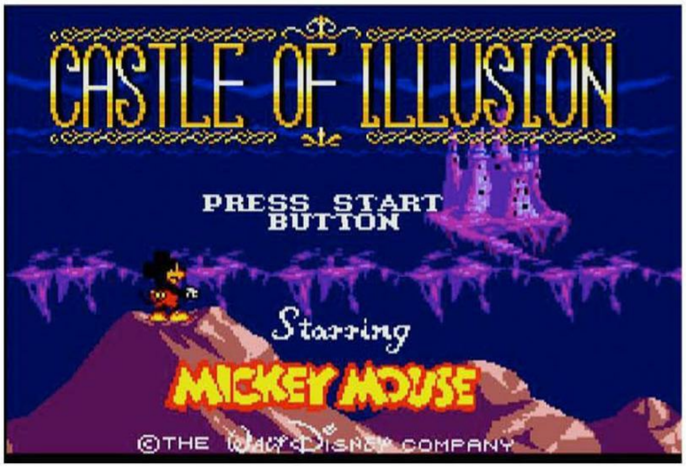
The pinball game is simple yet effective. The board is pretty poorly designed, but it is a pinball game. You don't win any money or really get any enjoyment out of this, but it is here nonetheless.

All in all there is enough here to keep a budding gambler entertained for quite some time. Plus it helps that there is a password feature so you can build your virtual fortune over time, which is nice because if you have a few bad hands at Poker you'll be out on the street wandering down a dark back alley looking to do god knows what just for a few dollars to get you back in the game. Wow, who knew an 8-Bit game could be so realistic?

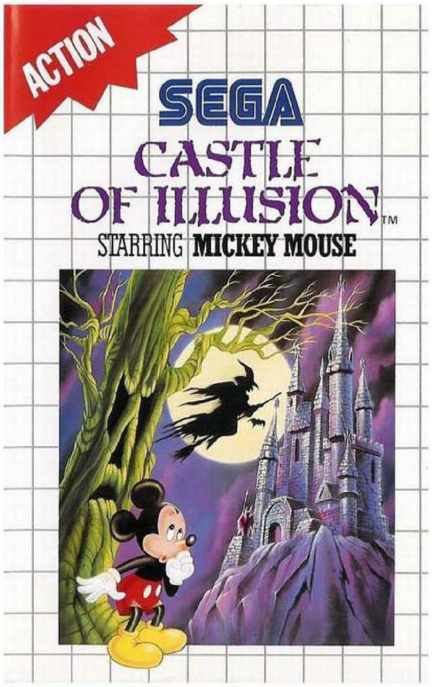
CASTLE OF ILLUSION

Release Date: 1990
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1

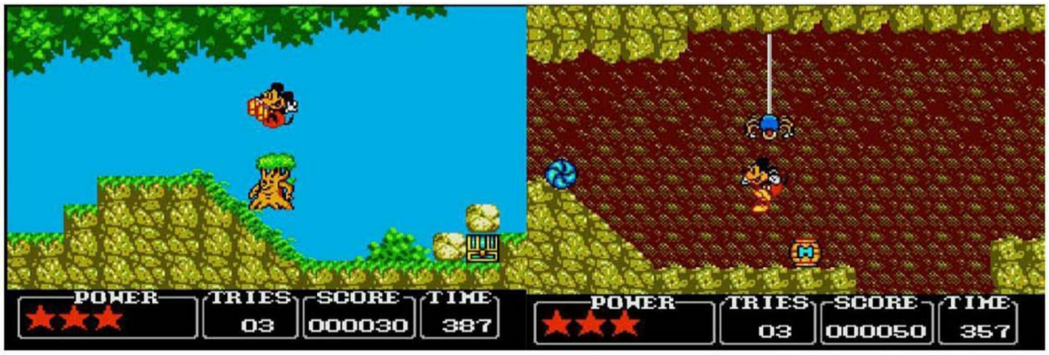

CASTLE OF ILLUSION
PRESS START BUTTON
Starring
MICKEY MOUSE
©THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY

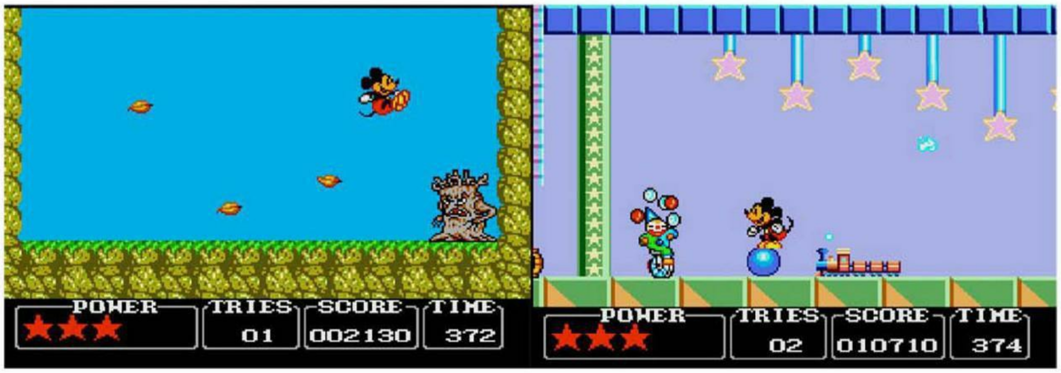
This is a rather impressive port of the Sega Genesis game.

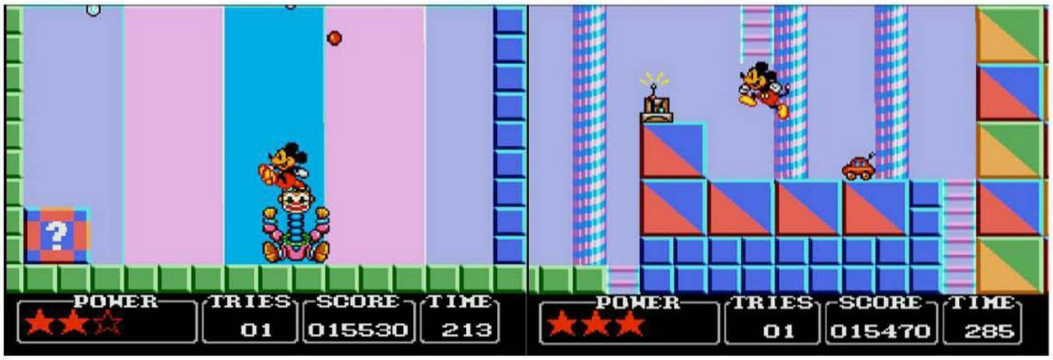

ACTION
SEGA
CASTLE OF ILLUSION™
STARRING MICKEY MOUSE

This is one of those games that really show off the graphical power of the Master System. You are in control of the worlds most famous mouse...no, not Itchy...Mickey. Anyway, you are in control of Mickey Mouse as he goes on a quest to find the seven gems that will defeat Mizrabel and reunite him with his love Minnie.

There are six levels that will take you everywhere from a forest to toy land to a magical land of candy that would make Willy Wonka jealous. Unlike a lot of games in this genre, the action isn't simply "get from point A to point B by going left to right", there is actually a surprising amount of variety here. For starters most levels have multiple paths to the boss, tons of hidden areas, and even throws in the occasional forced movement level filled with some pretty devious jumps. Thankfully the controls are spot on so navigating these levels can be done with ease.

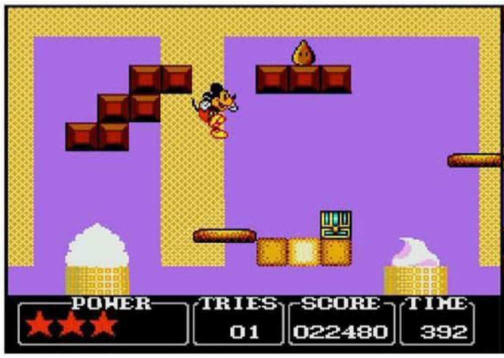

POWER
TRIES
03
SCORE
000030
TIME
387
POWER
TRIES
03
SCORE
000050
TIME
357

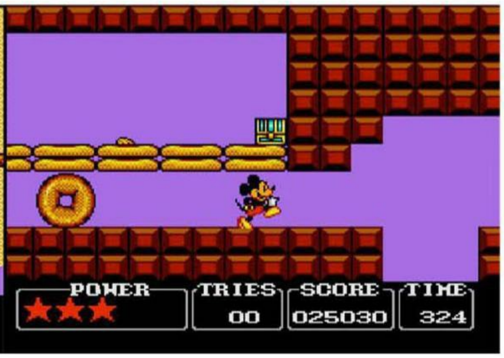

POWER
TRIES
01
SCORE
002130
TIME
372
POWER
TRIES
02
SCORE
010710
TIME
374



As this is a Mickey Mouse game, the enemies are pretty non-threatening. There are happy little trees, remote control cars, chocolate kisses, and every now and then you'll be chased down a long hallway by a giant rolling bagel like Indiana Jones. The bosses up the ante a little bit, but even they aren't that threatening. That said, some of the bosses will give you some trouble. The first couple (The evil tree and evil jack in the box) have simple patterns that are easy to figure out and exploit. The candy land boss however is one that could cause a controller throwing tantrum. This giant killer chocolate bar throws blocks at you, but then to move to the other side of the screen it breaks up into multiple pieces and throws them at you. In order to survive this you have to do your best Neo imitation and do a precise series of jumps and ducks, and you must do this multiple times since the boss requires four hits. This is unfortunate since the game is aimed at a younger audience and a lot of them will get stuck on this level due to the difficulty of the boss (and yes, I'm aware there is a "death by chocolate" joke in there somewhere, but I'm going to take the high road and refrain).

While this is technically a port of the Genesis version, there are some major differences that make this version stand on its own. Unlike the Genesis version where Mickey could stockpile projectiles, he must instead rely on his new ability to pick up and throw objects at enemies. To take further advantage of this the designers created movable platforms that Mickey can carry around and use to reach higher platforms and ladders, which is a unique feature of the Master System version.

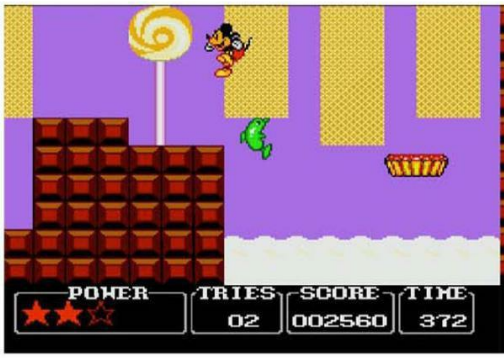

POWER
TRIES
SCORE
TIME
01
022480
392


POWER
TRIES
SCORE
TIME
00
025030
324

The other change is to the level design itself. While the level themes more or less correspond with the Genesis version, the levels themselves have been changed dramatically. This means if you were a fan of the Genesis version you can play this one and get the feeling that this is pseudo-sequel or remix version. The graphics aren't quite as pretty as the 16-Bit version, however they are quite beautiful for an 8-bit game and really show off the power of the Master System.

The other thing worth mentioning is the continue situation. Unlike most genre games on the Master System that only allowed a single continue or required hidden codes to continue, extra credits are plentiful here. Not only are you given a few to start with, you can earn extra ones with every 10,000 points you gain, which is made considerably easier since you can pick up coins worth 2,000 points. If you survive the first level unscathed it's very possible to have 9 continues stockpiled.

Mickey Mouse and the Castle of Illusion is hands down one of the crown jewels of the Master System catalog. It's incredibly solid and still holds up to this day and is worth playing by fans of the genre.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SCORE
TIME
02
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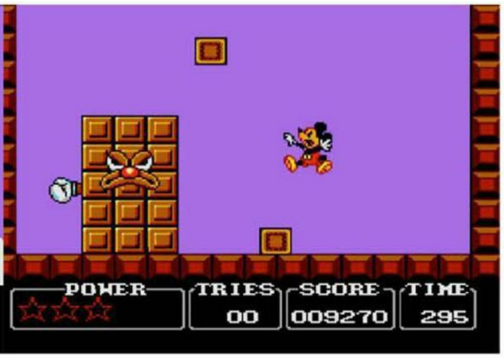
372


POWER
TRIES
SCORE
TIME
00
009270
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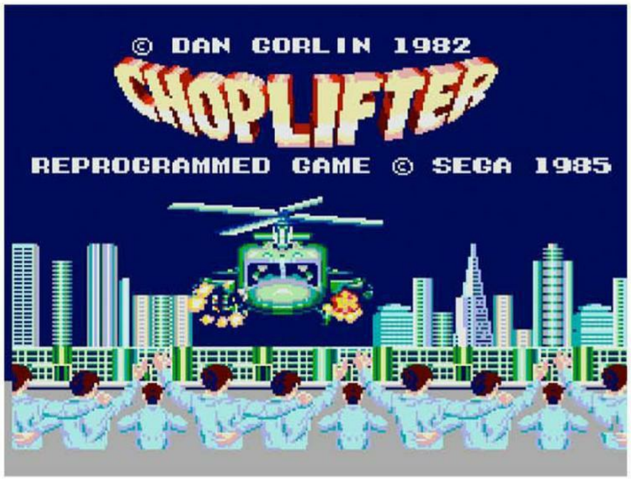
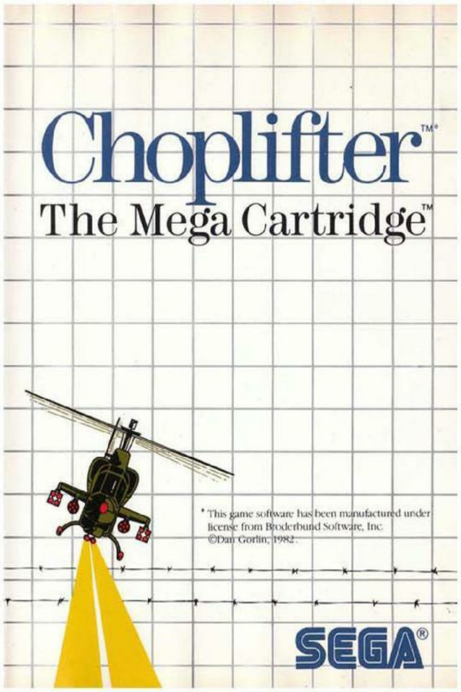
CHOPLIFTER

Release Date: 1986
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1 - 2

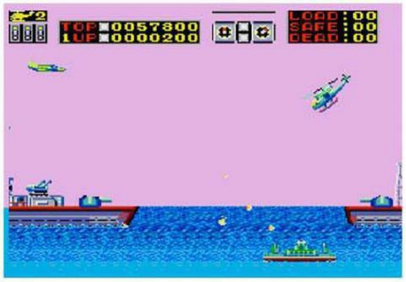

© DAN GORLIN 1982
CHOPLIFTER
REPROGRAMMED GAME © SEGA 1985

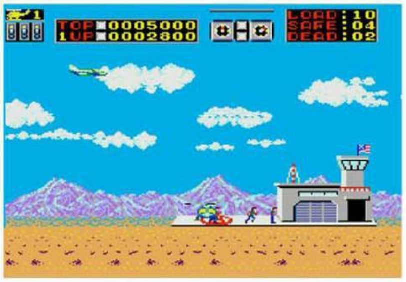
In this solid arcade port you in control of a suicidal chopper pilot tasked with flying deep behind enemy territory to rescue POW's and bring them back to safety.


Choplifter™*
The Mega Cartridge™
* This game software has been manufactured under license from Broderbund Software, Inc. ©Dan Gorlin, 1982.
SEGA®

At your disposal is a semi-automatic canon and a handful of bombs that can only hit certain targets. At their disposal are tanks, jets, dudes packing machine guns in the back of jeeps, warships, mother nature, and a host of other things. Long story short is that the odds are stacked against you.

Thankfully though the controls are incredibly tight, which is handy since you often have to make precise movements in order to dodge a wall of oncoming enemy fire. The only difficult thing is changing directions, which is handled with a button press. If you are flying to the left and want to head back to the right you have to start flying that way and tap the button a couple of times to turn you around, or else you'll be flying in reverse, which is never a good thing. Also, if you want to start bombing things like tanks and jeeps you have to be flying sideways, which puts you at a major disadvantage since you move much slower than normal and everything else can take you down with ease.


2
TOP 0057800
1UP 0000200
LOAD:00
SAFE:00
DEAD:00


1
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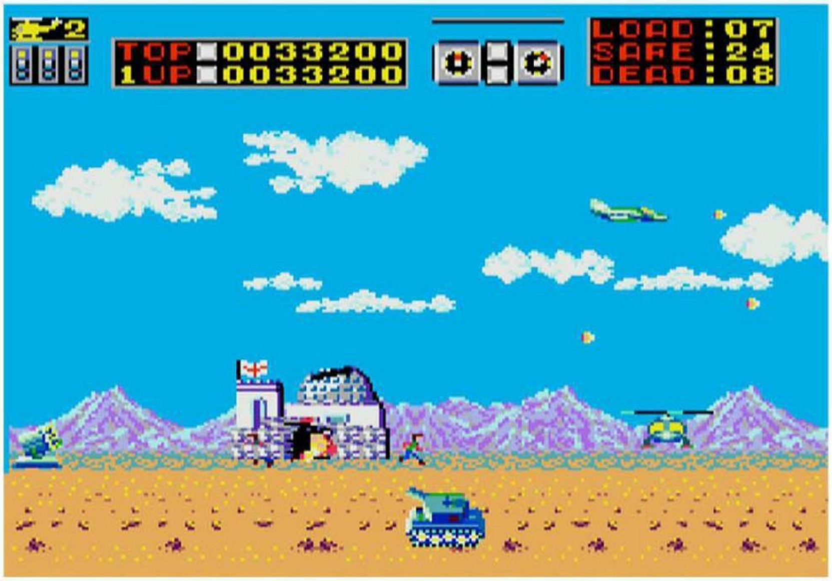
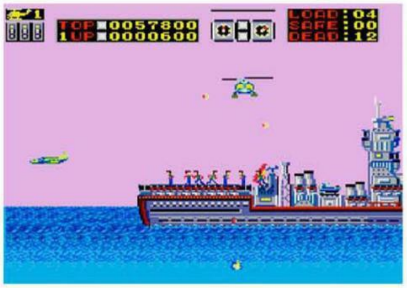
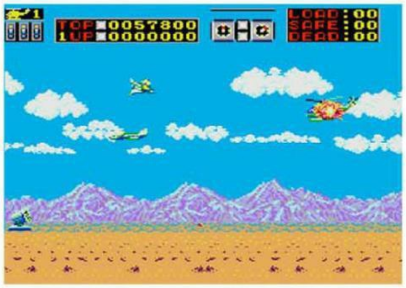
DEAD:02

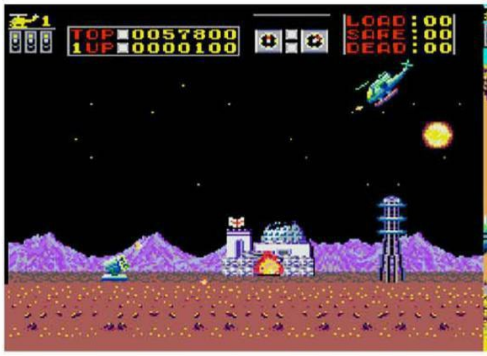
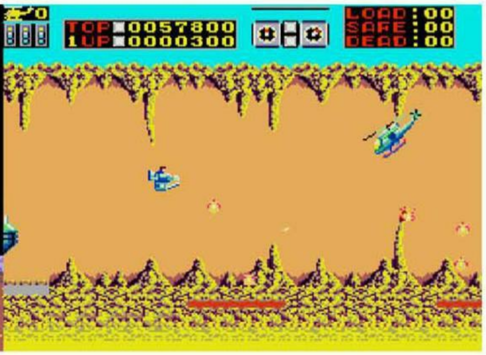

2
TOP 0033200
1UP 0033200
LOAD:07
SAFE:24
DEAD:08





Each of the six levels play out the same basic way. You have to find the buildings where the POW's are being held, fire a few rounds into the roof to set the POW's free, land and collect them while occasionally taking off to bomb a pesky tank who is taking potshots at you, then fly all the way back to base to unload them. Then it's lather/rinse/repeat until you have broken out all of the POW's. Now before you try and run through the game by just flying across the stage and blowing up all the POW's prisons, you must rescue a certain number of them in order to proceed to the next level, and unfortunately for you these POW's are fragile. Not only can they be killed if an enemy tank shoots them, you can also kill them my landing on them. This puts a damper on the rescue as you only have a few seconds on the ground before you will be blown to bits, so you must get as close to them as possible, which usually requires one or two to become human pancakes in order for the rest to survive. One more thing, don't park too close to the burning building because if you block the door the POW's can't figure out how to get out, so they just stay inside the building and burn to death.

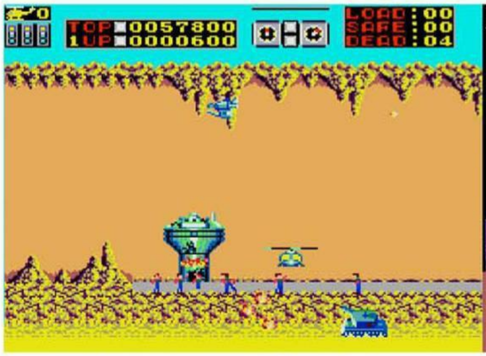
While the 6 levels are laid out basically the same way, the backdrop changes from level to level. The first two stages are typical military encounters, taking place in a desert and on top of an armada of battleships. Something strange happens between level two and three however, as it becomes obvious that you aren't rescuing prisoners of war from a rival military, but rather a vintage Bond villain. Level 3 takes place in a hollowed out cavern filled with gun turrets, henchmen flying around in 60's style futuristic flying machines, and perfectly timed lava pits that throw fireballs at you in such a way that only the luckiest pilots will emerge unscathed (of course if the fireballs miss you the half dozen rockets flying at you will certainly take you out). Assuming you survive the subterranean lair of doom, you have to rescue POW's from the Bond villains backup base....on the moon. Now, I have no idea why there is a hideout on the moon, nor am I clued into the physics on how a helicopter can fly in outer space, but pondering those issues will be the least of your worries as before the lack of gravity will kill you the never ending stream of projectiles will.


TOP 0057800
1UP 0000100
LOAD:00
SAFE:00
DEAD:00

TOP 0057800
1UP 0000300
LOAD:00
SAFE:00
DEAD:00

Assuming you survive the moon you are back in familiar territory on the sea again (and then the cave for one more assault). Even though these are rehashes of earlier stages they are much more difficult this time around thanks to there being even more stuff on screen that can send your chopper crashing to the ground in a flaming heap.

Needless to say, the difficulty level in Choplifter is through the roof, which is understandable since the game originated as an arcade game whose sole purpose in life was to collect quarters, and you just don't do that with an easy game that people can play forever on a single credit. One fun thing to pay attention to when starting the game though. On the title screen the chopper is flying in front a line of celebrating POW's, and after a few seconds it fires off about a dozen rounds aimed right at them. One would assume that it was celebratory fire, but considering it was aimed right at their heads it doesn't look like the pilot was too thrilled about having to risk his life to rescue them.

Extreme difficulty aside, Choplifter is an incredible port of the arcade classic and still holds up to this day.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1UP 0000600
LOAD:00
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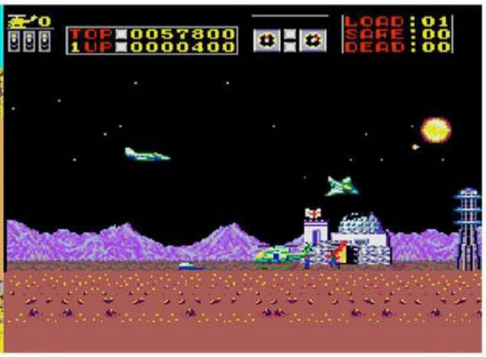

TOP 0057800
1UP 0000400
LOAD:01
SAFE:00
DEAD:00

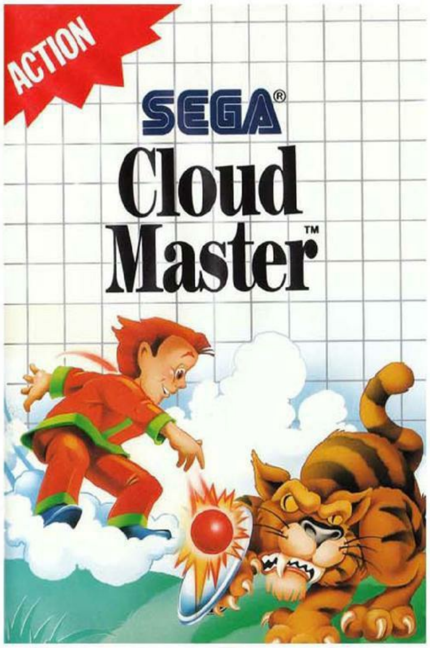
CLOUD MASTER

Release Date: 1989
Developer: Hot-B
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Shmup
Players: 1 - 2

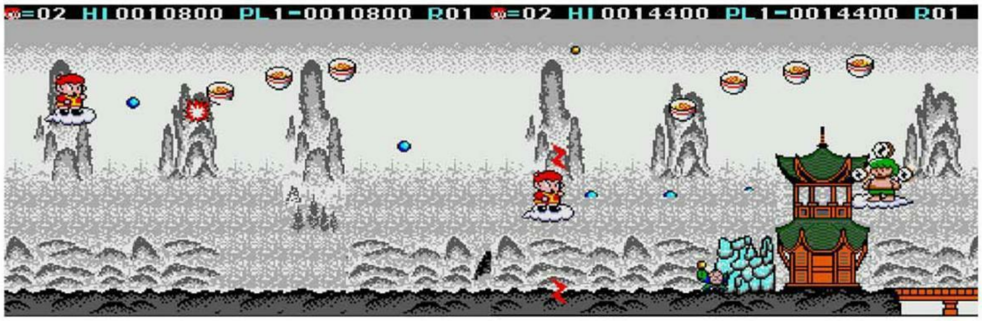
CLOUD MASTER
中華大仙

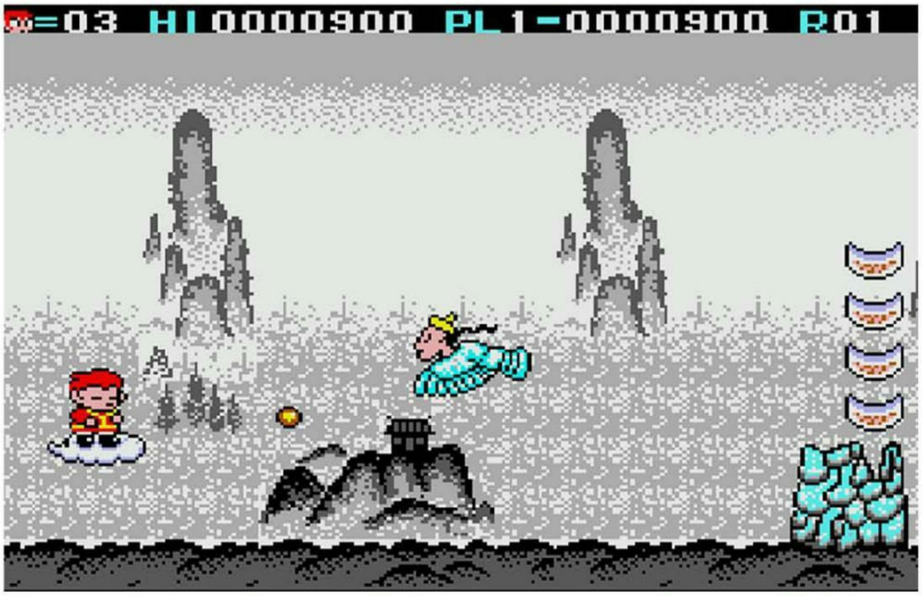
Cloud Master is a tough as nails quirky shooter. Did I say quirky? I meant as strange as they come.


ACTION
SEGA
Cloud Master

Seriously, if the designers weren't doing some sort of illicit drugs I would be shocked. Basically you are in control of a crazy cloud riding, fireball throwing hermit who has to battle his way through a never ending stream of...hmm...how should I put this...a never ending stream of unique enemies.

There are giant birds with the heads of high school guidance counselors, bowls of ramen flying in formation, and canon wielding pigs. And that's just the first part of the first stage. The enemies continue to get stranger from there, as there are everything from killer turtles to flying mahjong pieces to severed spinning cat heads. So yeah, unique doesn't even begin to describe it.

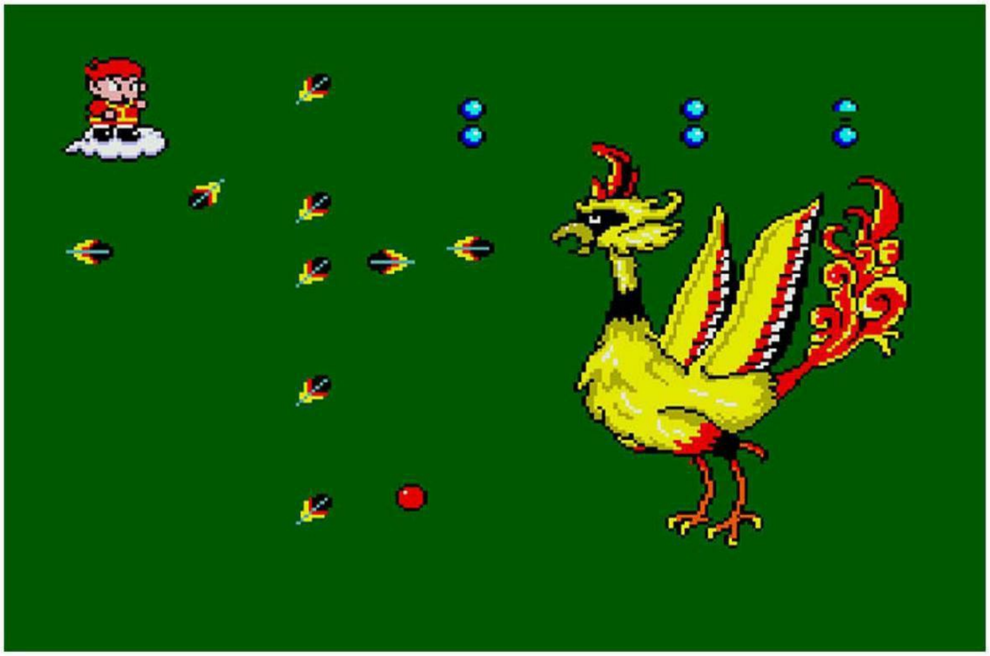

=02 HI 0010800 PL1-0010800 R01
=02 HI 0014400 PL1-0014400 R01

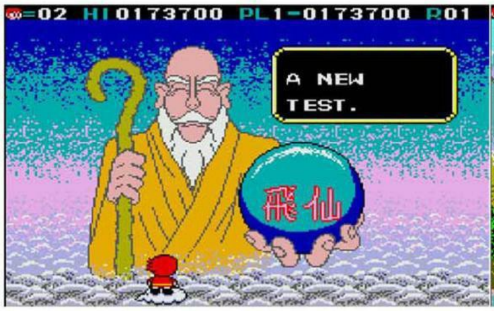

=03 HI 0000900 PL1-0000900 R01

You have the usual assortment of powerups. If you can shoot down the enemies flying in formation they will occasionally leave you a powerup that will make your primary fireball stronger and eventually make it into a multi-shot. There are also powerups that will make your cloud riding monk fly faster as well as give you auto fire, so instead of being forced to hit the fire button as fast as you can you can simply hold it down to fill the screen with death and destruction.

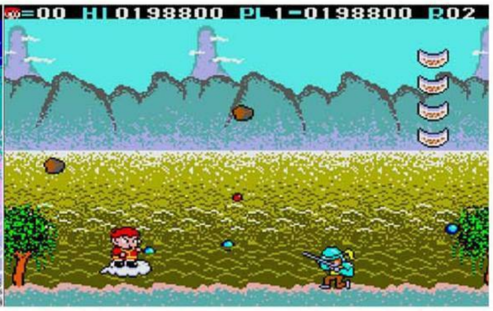
At several points on the levels you will face off against another cloud riding bad guy that throws several lightening bolts at you. If you are able to defeat them a doorway will appear in the sky and you will be rewarded with a magical ability. These can range from bombs to fireballs to a fire shield. These magical powers can be helpful during the level, but don't help much with the bosses.

Speaking of bosses, the weirdness is still present here. Take the first level boss for example. When you reach the end of the level the screen will flash and go black, and after a few moments a killer Chocobo from the wrong side of the tracks shows up to make your life painful. And make your life painful it will.



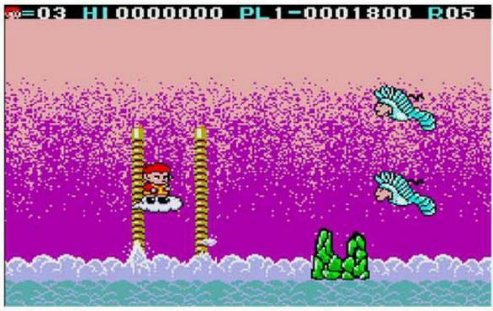

=02 HI 0173700 PL1-0173700 R01
飛仙

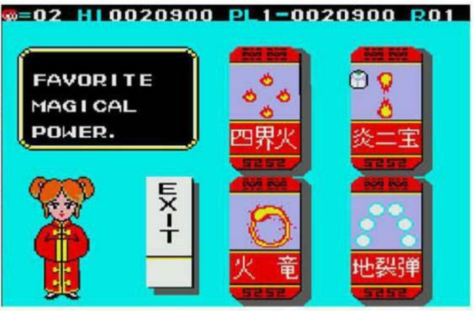
A NEW TEST.


=00 HI 0198800 PL1-0198800 R02

And this brings us to the biggest problems with the game. Sure the one hit deaths are annoying, but it's made infinitely more so thanks to the fact that your character is just so freaking big. During the level it's hard enough to dodge oncoming fire, but with the bosses who fill the screen with bullets (or in the case of the first boss, feathers) it becomes virtually impossible to navigate the onslaught unscathed. To pour salt in the wound, you don't immediately respawn after dying, rather you are taken a bit back in the level and left to fight your way back to the boss. This is a double edged sword however, since yes it is no fun to have to refight your way to the end of the level again, it is nice that the game gives you an opportunity to grab a few powerups before the boss.

This is one of the better shooters for the Master System, not only is it fun to play, but it will also give you hours of entertainment trying to figure out exactly what the creators were smoking in order to come up with some of these enemies.


=03 HI 0000000 PL1-0001800 R05

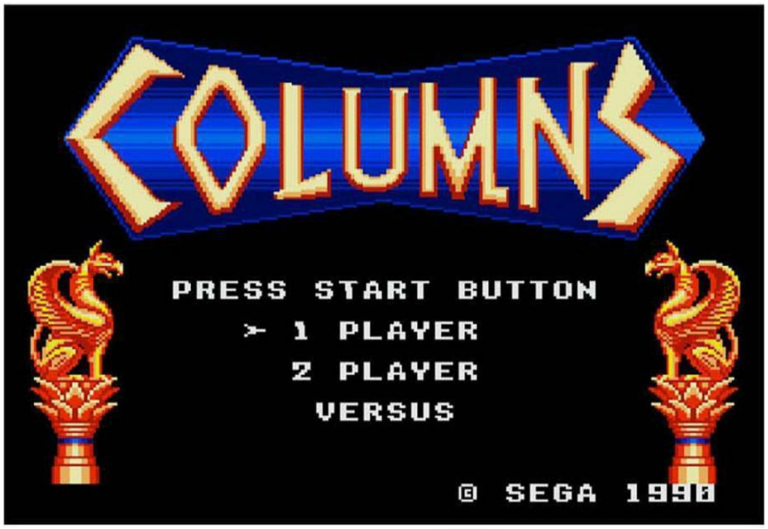

=02 HI 0020900 PL1-0020900 R01
四界火
炎二宝
火 竜
地裂弾
EXIT

FAVORITE MAGICAL POWER.

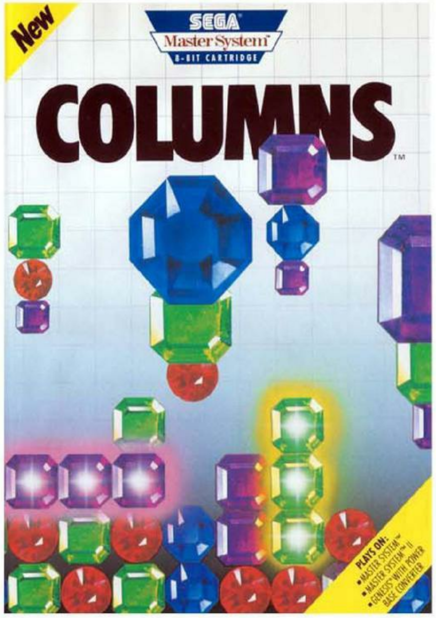
COLUMNS

Release Date: 1990
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Puzzle
Players: 1 - 2

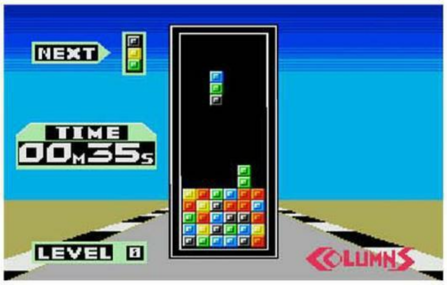

COLUMNS
PRESS START BUTTON
➤ 1 PLAYER
2 PLAYER
VERSUS
© SEGA 1990

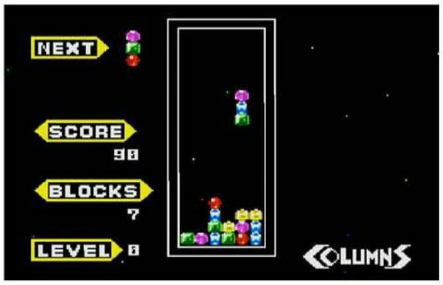
Columns is Sega's answer to Tetris on the Nintendo, and while not overtaking the pinnacle of puzzle games, Columns is one of the best puzzlers out there.

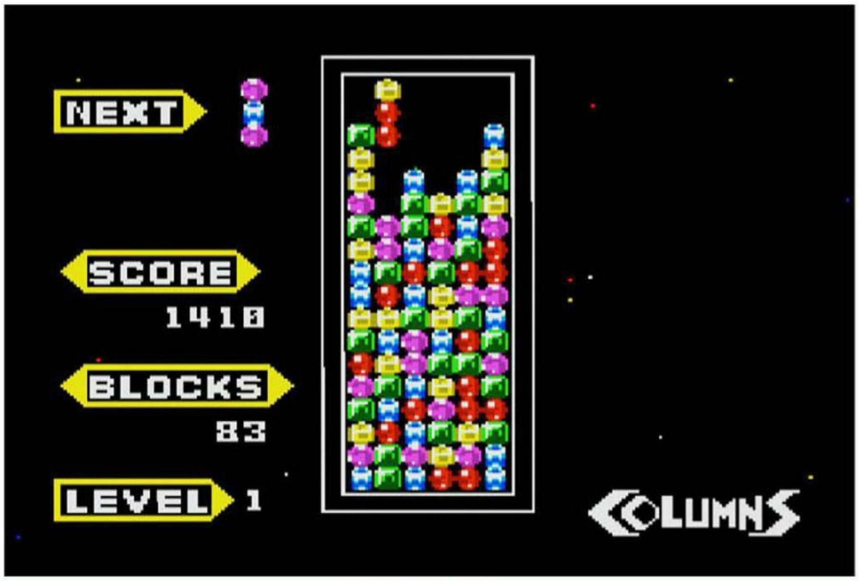

New
SEGA
Master System
8-BIT CARTRIDGE
COLUMNS
PLAYS ON:
MASTER SYSTEM
MASTER SYSTEM II
GENESIS WITH POWER BASE CONVERTER

The basic premise of the game is to maneuver the three jewel columns falling from the top of the screen into the best place on the board in order to create three connecting jewels of the same color. The matches can be vertical, horizontal, or diagonal. You can also set up more impressive shapes like "L" or "X" to really boost your score, but those aren't necessary unless you are trying to set a new high score.

At the beginning the jewels fall as a very slow pace, but for every 50 matched jewels you go up a level which increases the speed. While the speed can be challenging, it doesn't become impossible until you hit level 9 when the blocks drop so fast it's hard to tell if they are moving down the screen or just appearing at the bottom. This is good because it makes it very easy for someone to pick up and play, while simultaneously giving a challenge to the hardcore players out there. If you are one of the hardcore players you have the option of picking your starting speed (up to level 9).


NEXT
TIME
00M35S
LEVEL 0
COLUMNS

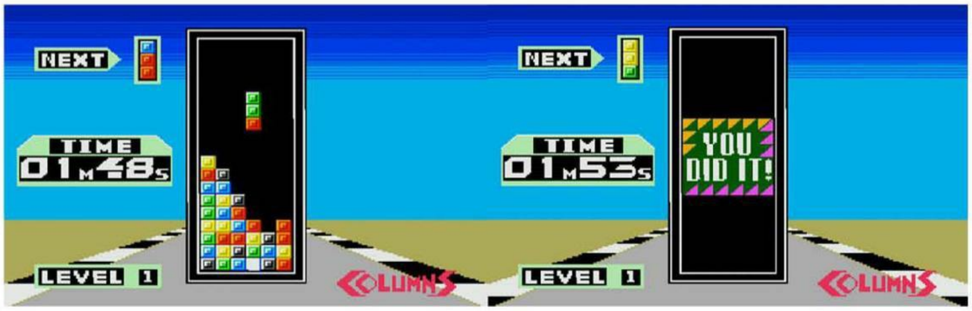

NEXT
SCORE
90
BLOCKS
7
LEVEL 0
COLUMNS


NEXT
SCORE
1410
BLOCKS
83
LEVEL 1
COLUMNS

There are five different colored jewels, which is both good and bad. It's good because more often than not, no matter what is dropping from the sky you will have an opportunity to make a match. This is a far cry from Tetris where you will usually end up pulling out your hair waiting on that one straight piece that seems to be MIA. It's bad because more often than not no matter what is dropping from the sky you will have an opportunity to make a match. To experience why this is a bad thing do the following experiment. Start a new basic game, put the level at 9, and just randomly drop the columns around the board while hitting the shuffle button as fast as you can. Without even trying you will be setting off massive chain reactions and inadvertently clearing the board. On my random test I hit 300 jewels before finally having my game come to an end. This isn't exactly a great quality to have in a puzzle game since making a move that isn't very well thought out should be punished, not rewarded. All in all it's not a game killer, just something that holds it back from being an all time classic puzzle game.

In addition to the basic never ending game, you can also bring a friend along for a two player match, as well as try your hand at the Flash Mode. Instead of trying to survive for as long as possible, in the Flash Mode your only goal is to take out a randomly chosen jewel that is buried beneath a stack of other jewels. This mode does a nice job of making you rethink your strategies and change how you play the game. It would have been nice if they could have made this a continuous mode where a new flash jewel would appear after taking out the previous one, but it's a minor complaint.

The graphics for Columns aren't that impressive (especially when compared to the Genesis version of the game), but it really doesn't matter since it's doesn't detract from the gameplay. If you have a choice of versions I suggest the Genesis version, but in a pinch the Master System version gets the job done.

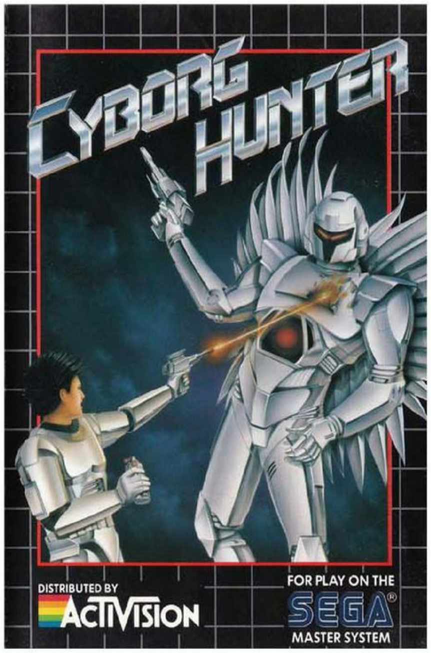


CYBORG HUNTER

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Activision

Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1

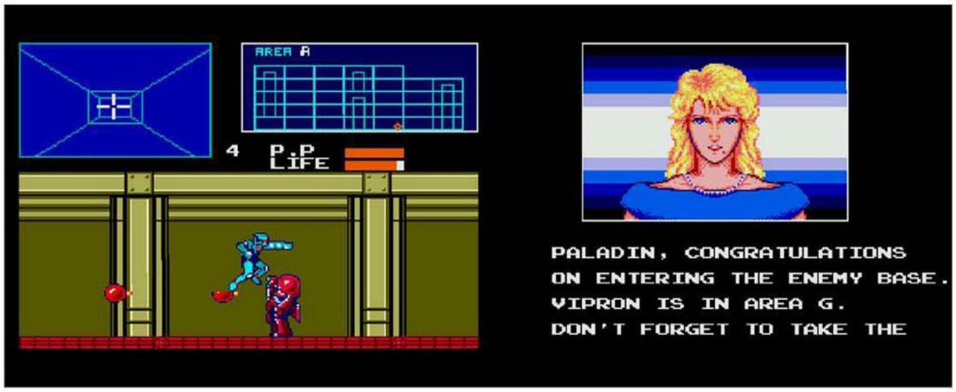
CYBORG
HUNTER


CYBORG HUNTER
DISTRIBUTED BY
ACTIVISION
FOR PLAY ON THE
SEGA
MASTER SYSTEM

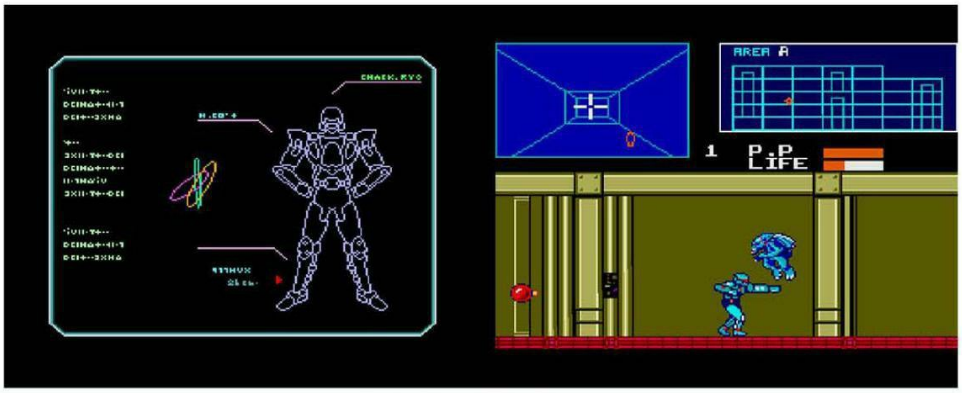
Rather than go the traditional action game route, Cyborg Hunter does away with the standard "get from point A to point B and kill everything in the middle" gameplay.

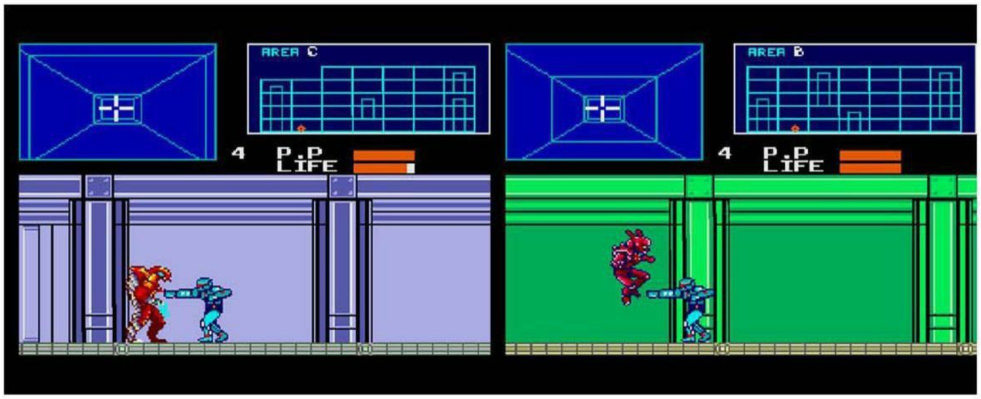
In it's place is a rudimentary version of Metroid, where you must explore different maze like areas while collecting powerups that allow you to reach the next section. The mazes are somewhat straightforward however, and thanks to the map in the upper right hand corner it is very easy to sweep all the necessary areas before moving on. Unless you possess a Clark Griswald level of navigation it will be virtually impossible to get lost in these areas.

The story is pretty basic. You are the bounty hunter Paladin who is sent on a mission to defeat the evil Vipron (seriously) and his army of evil cyborgs who are bent on enslaving the universe. Of course with a name like Vipron, is there any other occupation he could have embarked on? It was either universal domination or a general in Cobra. The only other story exposition you get comes from your lovely assistant who looks like she is delivering the 10 O'clock news in Boise, and even those bits of information are little more than what gun to collect and who you need to kill to access the next level.



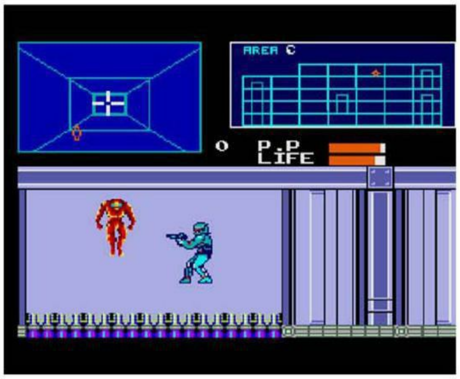
PALADIN, CONGRATULATIONS
ON ENTERING THE ENEMY BASE.
VIPRON IS IN AREA G.
DON'T FORGET TO TAKE THE

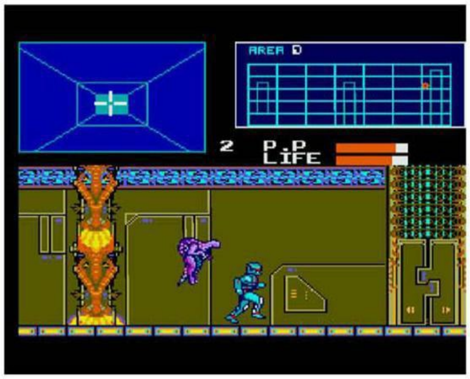




The game is broken up into seven different sections, labeled A-G. At the start of the game sections A-C are available, although it does make things easier to play them in order. The goal of this first section is to collect a handful of powerups so you can defeat the first section boss and steal his corporate ID card to open the up the next set of areas. The powerups are very useful given that you start out with nothing more than a punch. You can get shields, a jet pack, and a wide variety of ray guns. Of course this brings up the bigger point of why, if you are a universe saving bounty hunter, are you so completely ill-equipped to do battle? Seriously, how low rent is the organization you work for that they send you on a life or death mission with nothing more than your fists and a serious hope that your enemies will provide the weapons for you. On the other hand, what does it say about your enemies that they do indeed provide you the weapons needed to defeat them?

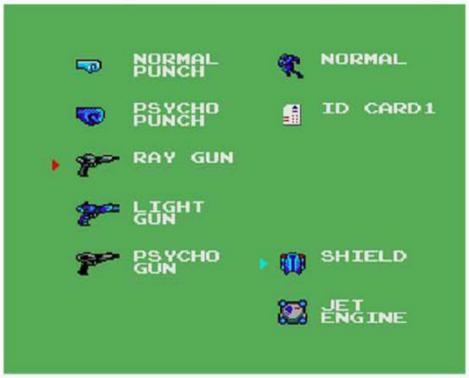
The enemies come in three varieties: Standard, Chiefs, and Bosses. The standard enemies are marked as red on your radar and are typically easily defeated by a couple of punches or a shot from your ray gun. The Chiefs are marked as white on your radar and when you get close to them emit one of the most ungodly sounds ever to grace an 8-Bit game. Sure you have motivation to kill them so you can move on to the next level, but the bigger motivation is to stop that sound from destroying your ear drums. The Chiefs are tougher to kill than your average enemy, and are typically pretty nifty. On one level you'll face off against giant red guys in battle armor with the heads of rabbits, and on the next level you'll do battle with walking acid spitting piranha. There is a counter on your dashboard that lets you know how many of the Chiefs are still remaining on the level in question, and all of them must be defeated before you can leave the area.

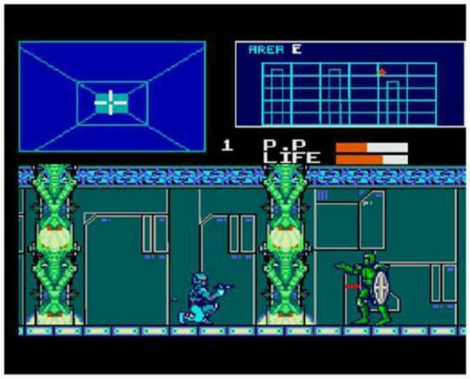


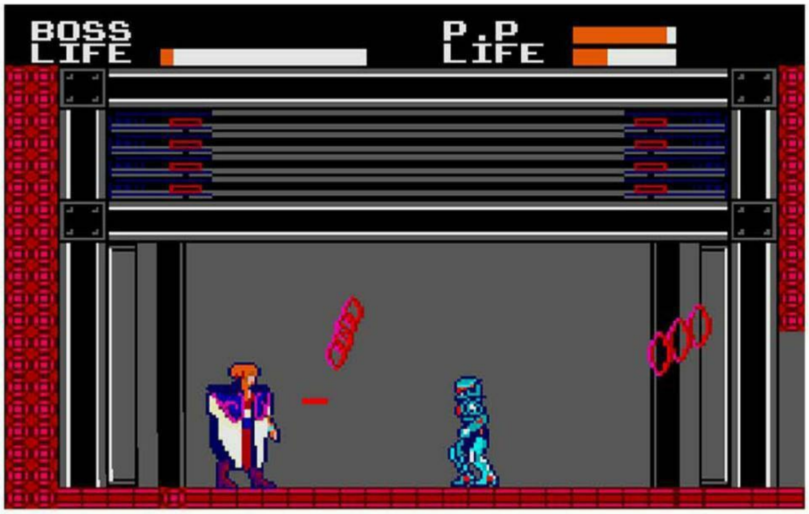


The Bosses are a curious bunch, as they don't look like cyborgs, and frankly, it's quite curious as to why they are present at all. The first boss is a giant cape wearing guy who leaps around the room blowing bubbles at you, while the next boss is a masked Mexican wrestler who throws fireballs at you. Granted, that last one is pretty cool, but it just feels out of place in a game called Cyborg Hunter.

There are some pretty big flaws in the game, the most noticeable being the controls. It's easy to run, jump, and fight, but if you want to change weapons you have to hit a button on the player two controller. Don't have another controller? Well looks like in the heat of battle you are going to have to unplug your controller, plug it back in, hit and hit the button before death. Thankfully you can exit the menu screen with the first controller, so you can leap right back into the fight. Another problem is with opening and operating the elevator system. You would think that a universally known bounty hunter would know the difference between opening a door and dropping an incredibly hard to find bomb, but you would think wrong. If you aren't perfectly lined up with the door your genius of a hero will instead plant a bomb. If you do manage to get into the elevator expect to flail around helplessly until you look up the overly complicated operating directions on the internet.

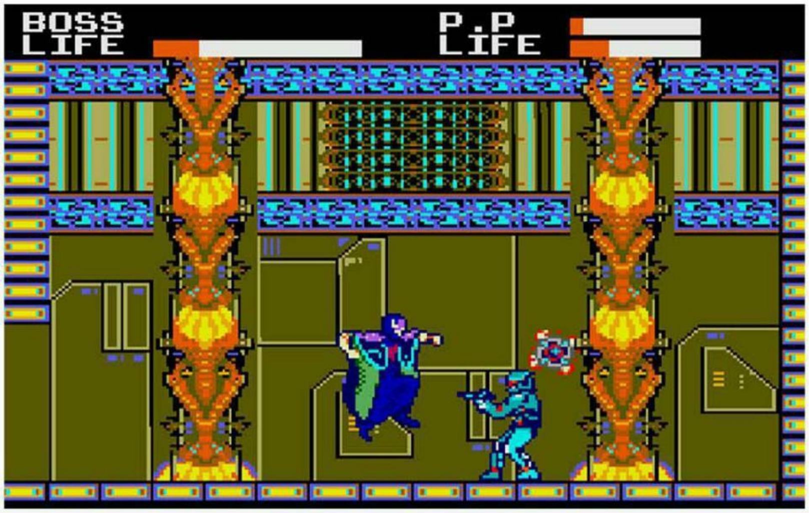






The other flaws aren't really major unless you are a gaming purist and enjoy a tough challenge. There are unlimited continues, which can be exploited because instead of fighting your way back down from the top of a section you can simply die and respawn at the entrance. Also, all health and special weapons refills magically reappear whenever you emerge from a doorway. Given that most of these are right beside a door you can go from near death to completely healed in about 60 seconds.

Flaws aside, this is still a very good Master System game and is still very much worth a play through. The game is fairly short, and thanks to the abundance of continues it is easily finished in an afternoon (which is good because there is no save or password feature).

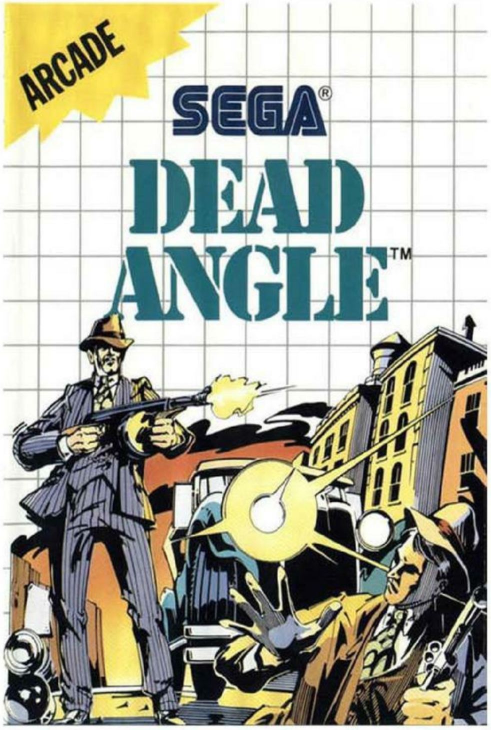


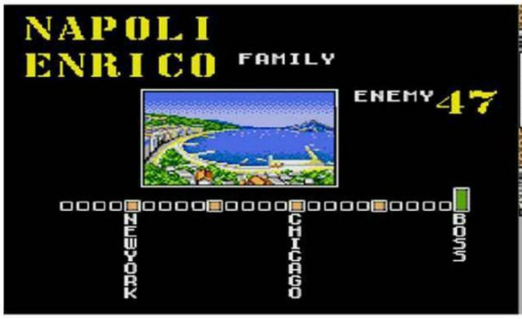
DEAD ANGLE

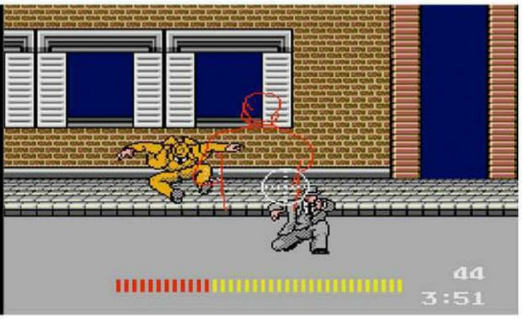
Release Date: 1989
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1

In Dead Angle you control Private investigator George Phoenix on his quest through 1930's gangster hot spots like Chicago and New York as he seeks to defeat "The King" and reclaim his girlfriend.


ARCADE
SEGA®
DEAD
ANGLE™

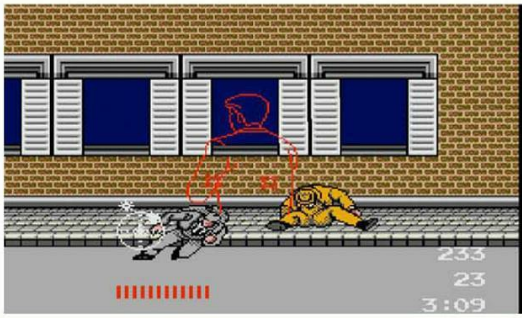


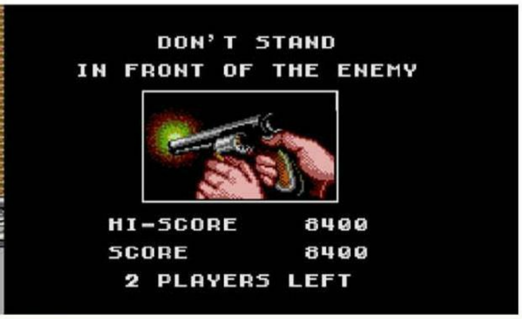


While it would be totally awesome to have a game where the main goal was to take out a gangster Elvis, I'm pretty sure "The King" refers to a Kingpin. Darn.

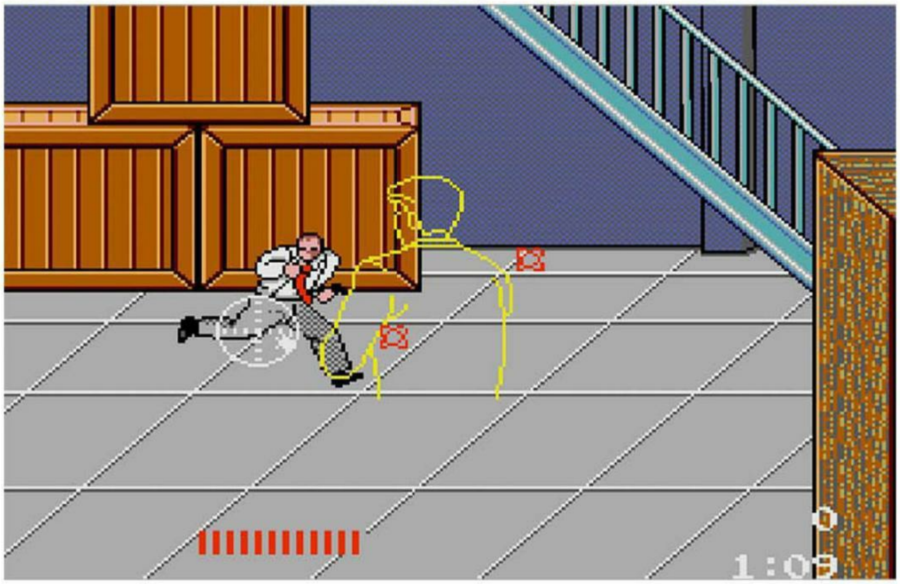
Each of the six stages play out the same way. You are given a predetermined body count that must be achieved before you are allowed to face off with a crime family boss. Meeting the body count is relatively easy at the beginning as all you have to do is slowly walk from side to side gunning down anyone who appears on screen. While your main revolver has unlimited ammo (and no need to ever reload), the real fun begins when you get the tommy gun powerup. This fully automatic death dealer makes taking out the crime family grunts easy, however it does have limited ammo so the fun is short lived.

Once the body count is high enough you get to take on a well dressed crime boss. Early on they are incredibly easy (once you get the pattern down that is). Basically you run away from them until they stop to shoot, you shoot them in the face then run away from them in the other direction, and repeat until they don't get back up again. This works pretty well until you hit the fourth level, where the boss throws heat seeking one hit kill knives at you (which is a bit strange since you can take multiple shots to the face without dying, but a knife to the shoulder is instant death).



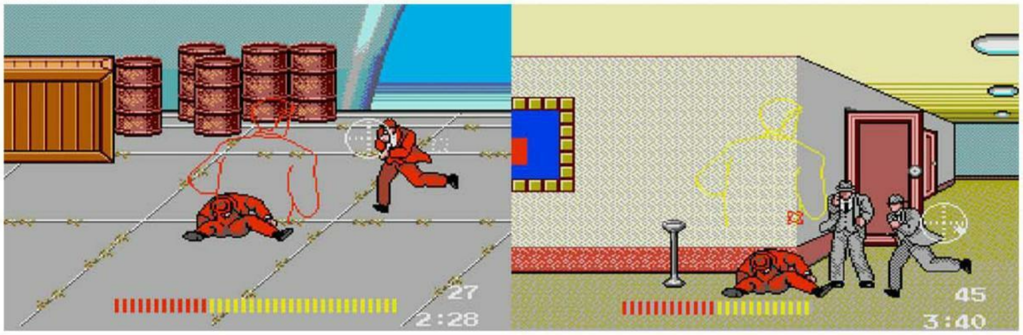

DON'T STAND
IN FRONT OF THE ENEMY

HI-SCORE 8400
SCORE 8400
2 PLAYERS LEFT



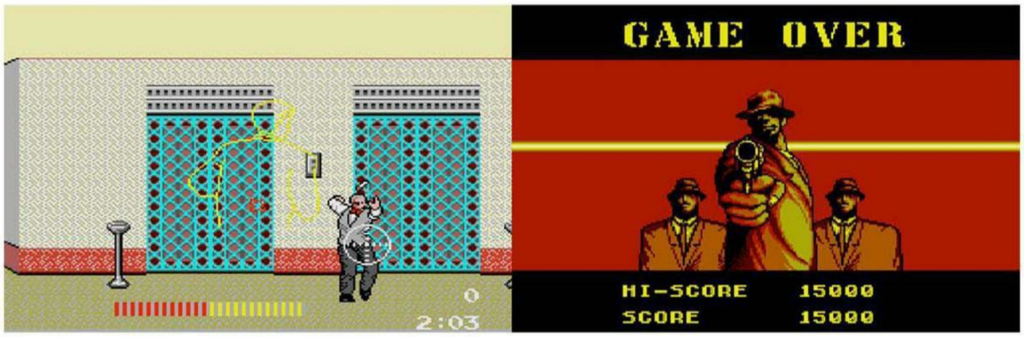
The most unique aspect of the game is the way you control your character. Instead of having an actual guy to control, all you have is a silhouette and a set of crosshairs. While this has been used to great effect in games like Dynamite Duke and Rambo 3 for the Genesis, it leaves a lot to be desired here. For starters, Mr. Phoenix moves like he is walking through a vat of pudding, and his crosshairs don't move much faster. As you can imagine that presents a bit of a problem when you have a trio of gangsters running full speed at you while firing bullets so quickly you'd swear their handguns were automatics.

There are some major problems with Dead Angle, the biggest of which is cheap spawn hits. The game tells you "don't stand in front of the enemy" every chance it gets, yet the game makes it incredibly difficult to follow that advice. The enemies have a tendency to drop out of the sky, or just randomly appear out of thin air (apparently the crime bosses are hiring magicians as their henchmen). More often than not they will appear directly in front of you with guns drawn and an itchy trigger finger, which means no matter what you do you are going to take damage. Now you would think that with a life bar that stretches halfway across the screen that wouldn't be a big deal, however you would think wrong since it only takes three hits to completely deplete it. In fact the only way to make it through the later levels is to inch along step by step and hope that the game doesn't decide that you have lived long enough.



The most curious thing present here shows up when you are filled with enough lead to end your life. Now, you are supposed to be a tough as nails PI who is strong enough to take down every major mob family in the world, yet when you die you yell out "ouch" in a voice that sounds like it was borrowed from a 12 year old girl. I realize that the Master System didn't have an advanced sound chip, but I would think that the final word from a manly man should be "aaaarrrggghhhh" and not the reaction from a teenage girl who skinned her knee.

Despite the problems, Dead Angle is worth a look, if for no other reason than to see one of the earliest attempts at the 3rd person perspective action gameplay.

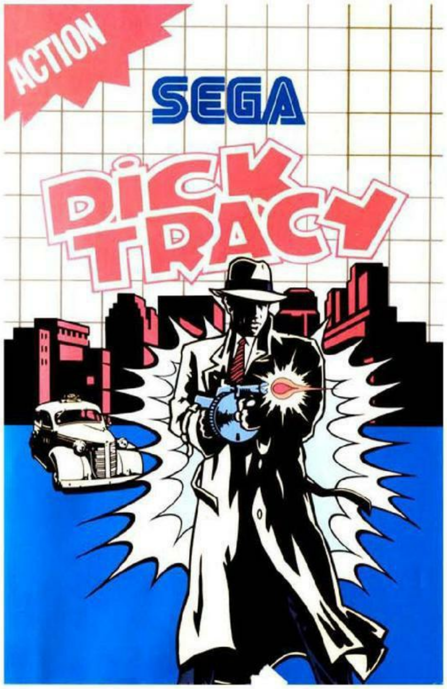


DICK TRACY

Release Date: 1990
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1

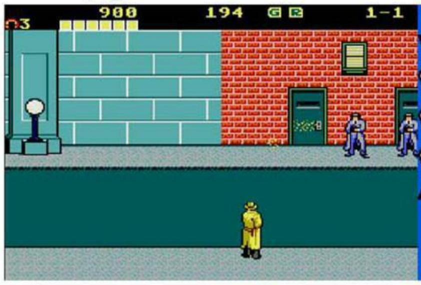
Dick Tracy is an action platforming game that is based on the Warren Beatty movie, which is turn based on the multitude of movies and film serials that began in the thirties, which in turn was based on Radio Drama serials, which was ultimately based on Chester Goulds comic strip.

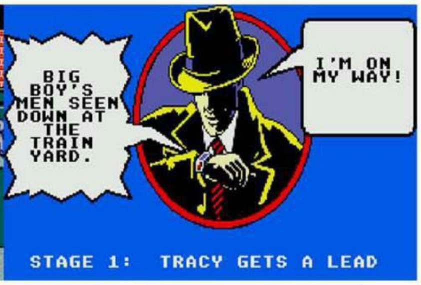


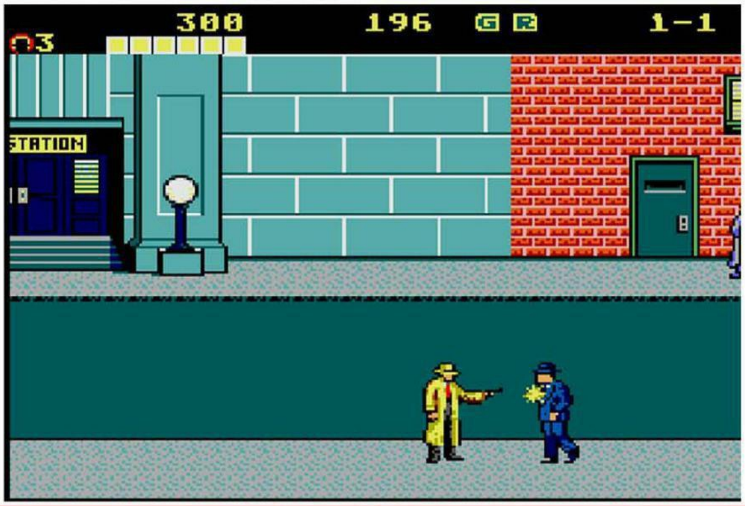
For those of you who don't know who Dick Tracy is, he is a hard nosed detective out to clean up the streets from gangsters. Sadly though, in this game Dick Tracy only detects things with his fists and tommy gun.

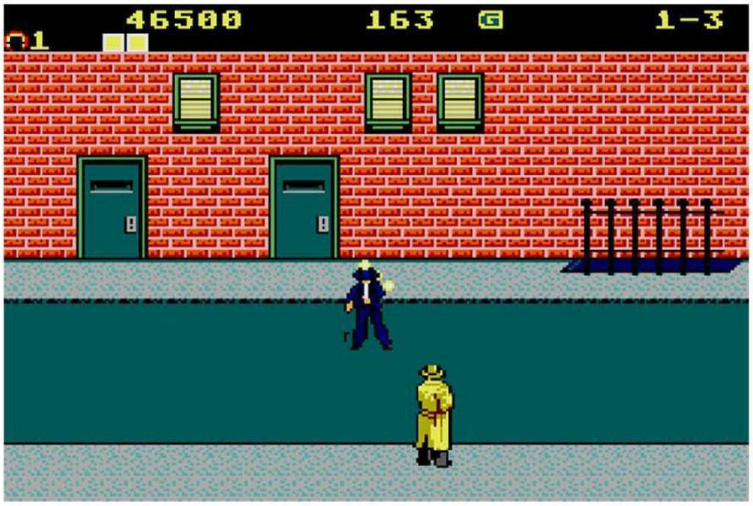
The story is basically Dick Tracy declares war on the Mob, and the only real plot progression is when a new level starts and it tells you who you are about to hunt down and kill. Of course in a game like this the story really isn't important, it's all about having an excuse to fight. Sadly though the fighting present here is more frustrating than fun.

The biggest problem is that the controls are incredibly poor. You have a button to jump, and you have a button to shoot and punch. This is a major issue because the game seems to randomly decide which it wants to do. You can be halfway across the screen from a bad guy and Dick Tracy with punch the air, and other times you'll be lining up a right hook and instead shoot the guy point blank in the face. For an added dimension of violence, a handful of bad guys will appear across the street and try to shoot you. The only way to take them out is to hold up on the controller and hit fire, which will unleash a hail of bullets from your tommy gun.



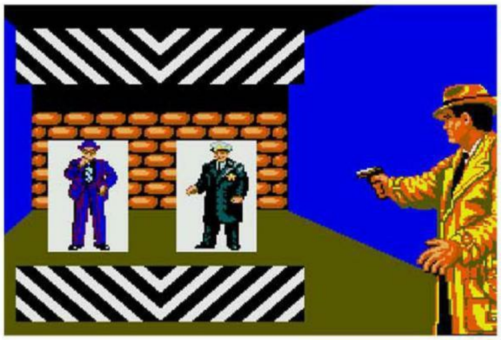

BIG BOY'S MEN SEEN DOWN AT THE TRAIN YARD.
I'M ON MY WAY!
STAGE 1: TRACY GETS A LEAD

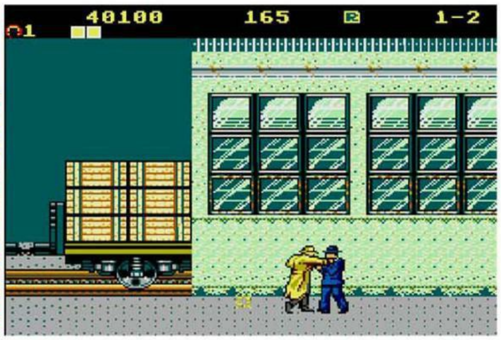




Thankfully it's easy to aim the tommy gun, as all you have to do is follow the bullet trail as it hits the street, the wall, and shatters the glass of the storefronts (If you are polite and don't destroy the shopkeepers pride and joy you get an extra point bonus at the end of the round, but where's the fun in that, right?). The final thing you can do is call in reinforcements by hitting both buttons at the same time. This will unleash an off screen machine gun attack that will wipe out anything that is moving. The problem is that when you are trying to shoot someone while leaping to avoid being shot you'll inadvertently trigger this special attack. To make matters worse is if you have already used this once per level item if will take you away from the action to say that you are on your own, before throwing you back into the chaos that you were frantically trying to escape. Expect to do this multiple times, and expect to die as a result of it.

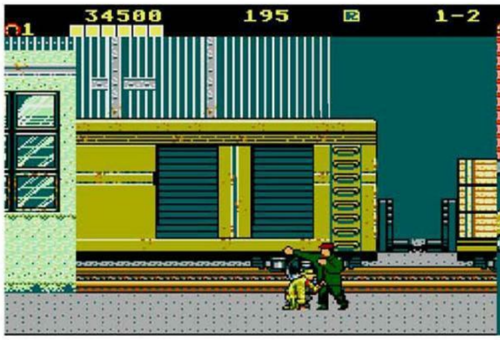
The levels are, for the most part, pretty straight forward. You walk from left to right killing everything in your path until you reach the end. Every now and then you'll fight a boss with your tommy gun, which is really nothing more than you standing still and unloading a thousand rounds of hot lead into their soon to be lifeless corpse. The other variety of level consists of you riding on the outside of a police car while having a shootout with other cars. This sounds more exciting than it really is thanks to the fact that the enemies can shoot at you from just off screen, making it impossible for you to shoot them. So while you are waiting for them to inch on screen far enough to take a shot to the face, you will have to imitate a pogo stick and constantly jump over bullets while occasionally pausing to use your tommy gun to take out the cars across the street.

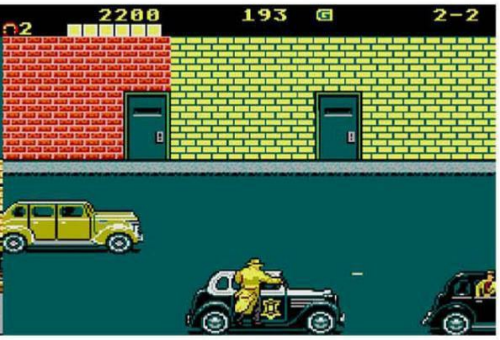




The problems don't end there however. Without warning there are some levels where Dick Tracy decides to be a straight up fighter, which means he holsters his gun and goes mano-a-mano with all comers. The problem with this is that while he has to get close enough to punch, the enemies are busy lobbing bottles and rocks at him, so more often than not you will have to get incredibly lucky to survive these levels. To add to the pain there are a random assortment of boxes that Dick Tracy must leap over. While that doesn't sound like that's too bad of a thing you'll quickly change your tune when you realize that the henchmen will simply stand there and wait for you to drop down so they can wail on you. And if you stand still too long they start chucking things at you, and one would assume taunt you for that outlandish yellow trench coat.

The lone bright spot in this entire game is after boss battles, where you get to go into a quick draw mini-game. Two cardboard cutouts will pop up and you have to shoot the bad guys while sparing the good guys. It is pretty simplistic, but rewarding as if you score high enough you can earn extra continue credits. Of course that's assuming anyone plays this game long enough to actually need a continue.



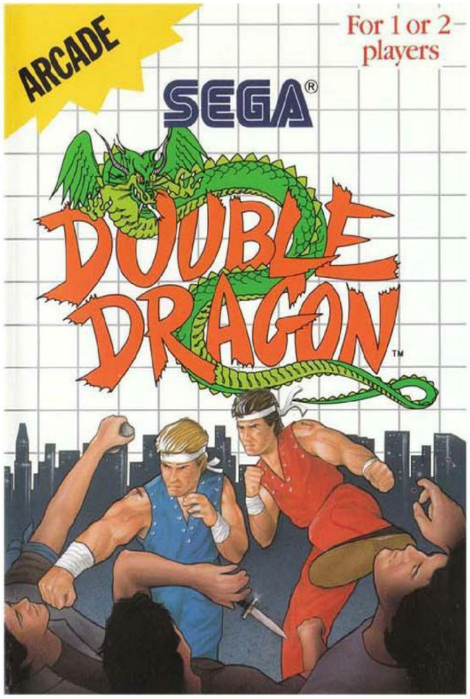


DOUBLE DRAGON

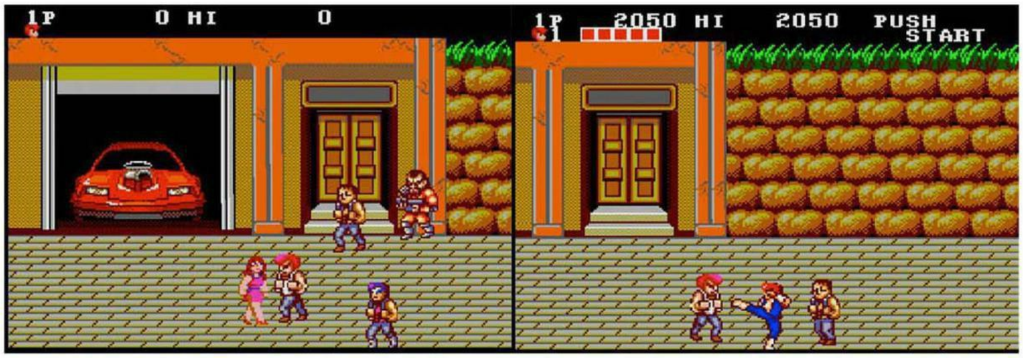
Release Date: 1988
Developer: Technos Japan
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Beat 'Em Up
Players: 1 - 2

DOUBLE DRAGON
双截龍
PUSH 1 OR 2 PLAY START BUTTON

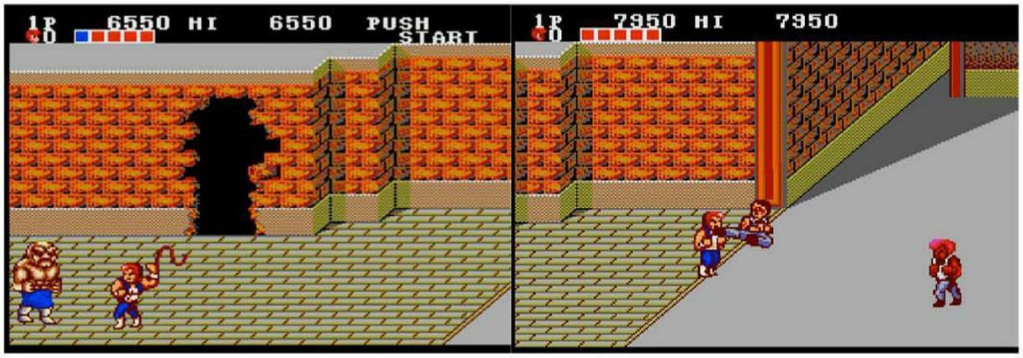

ARCADE
For 1 or 2 players
SEGA
DOUBLE DRAGON

Double Dragon is the pinnacle of the 1980's quarter munching Beat 'Em Ups, and in the Master System version all the arcade glory is here.



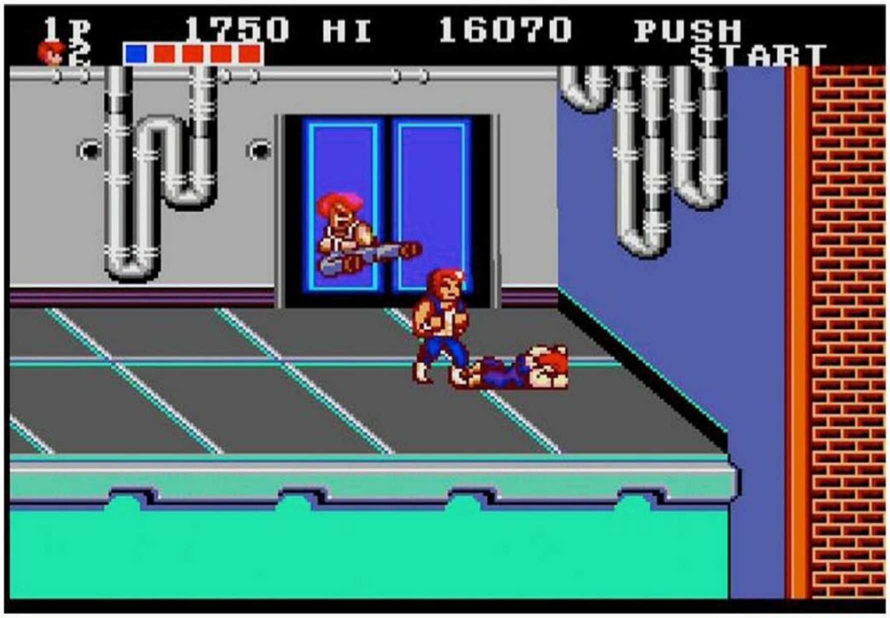
All of the enemies, all of the levels, and all of the epic frustration of that stupid out of place bridge jump are present and accounted for.

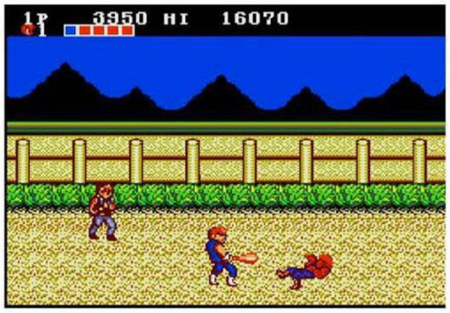
The story is simple, you control Billy or Jimmy Lee as they set off to rescue Billy's girlfriend Mary Ann from the dreaded Black Warrior gang. In order to accomplish this they must fight their way through city slums, an abandoned factory, an incredibly dangerous park, and the Black Warrior Gang's hideout. Also standing in their way is the Black Warrior Gang, which is apparently made up of four generic stock characters: Tank Top Guy, Jean Suit Guy, Wild Whip Woman, and Grotesquely Oversized Abobo's. The enemies do get more powerful as the game goes along, and you'll know when you are facing off against a stronger opponent when they show up as a different color. One of the skin colors is green, so apparently the Black Warrior Gang has been doing Hulk research.

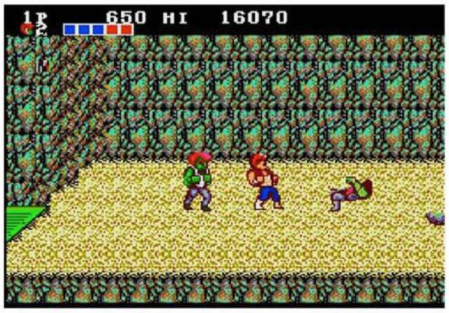


The combat is just plain brutal, in both style and execution. As soon as you begin your quest the first gang member you meet will welcome you to the fight with a jump kick to the face, and follow that up with a rapid fire series of punches and kicks that will have you laying face down on the ground and knocking on deaths door before you even get a chance to figure out which button is the punch button. The difficulty ramps up from there as every single enemy in the game has the potential to take your life. Thankfully you have unlimited continues for most of the game, so you'll be able to take a licking and keep on ticking (at least until you reach the final stage).

There are a couple of weapons you can pick up to help you fend off the angry masses. The bat is nice since it can hit people in front of you as well as behind you, the box/rock is a nice ranged weapon that can be reused provided it doesn't fly offscreen, but by far the best weapon in the game is the whip. Once you get the whip in your hands you'll be able to roll through anyone and everyone that gets close to you. Just don't get too full of yourself with the newfound power you possess, since as soon as you go to the next section of the stage you drop the weapon. Why, if you were in the middle of a vicious gang war, would you drop the only thing that gives you an upper hand? The only thing I can come up with is that Billy and Jimmy Lee are masochists who enjoy receiving blows to the face, which is why they want to make the road ahead as difficult as possible as to make sure they receive the maximum amount of punishment possible.

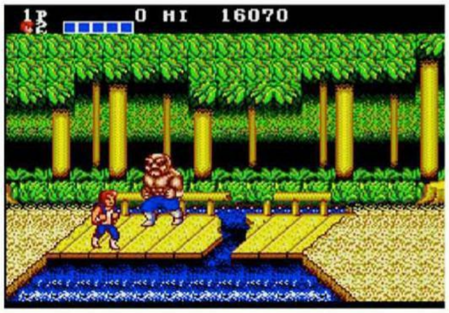


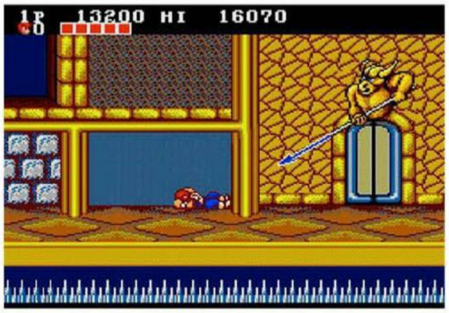




Even though this is a solid port, there are still plenty of problems to be found. The controls leave a lot to be desired since pulling off any move other than simple punches and kicks are virtually impossible. This is due to there being two buttons for a three button game, so instead of having the jump button to combine with the attack buttons to create new attacks, you have to use both attack buttons to jump. Supposedly you can pull off other moves with perfectly timed button presses, but I wouldn't hold my breath. There is a glitch that allows the Abobo to get you in an infinite throw loop, which means if he throws you once he can throw you again before you can stand back up, and he will continue doing this until you stop even attempting to get up. Fighting is also made more difficult since the enemies can occupy the exact same space as you, forcing you to back off in order to land a punch. But the biggest problem is that you get exactly zero continues once you hit the last stage. Now, it takes roughly 25 continues to make it through the first three levels, and if you aren't smart enough to continue just before you beat the third level you will be left with no lives on the final stage.

Problems aside, this is still a fun game to sit back and tackle with a friend. There are better ports of Double Dragon available for 16-bit systems, but if you are craving an 8-Bit version this one is more authentic than the NES version (which was essentially a reimagining the arcade game).





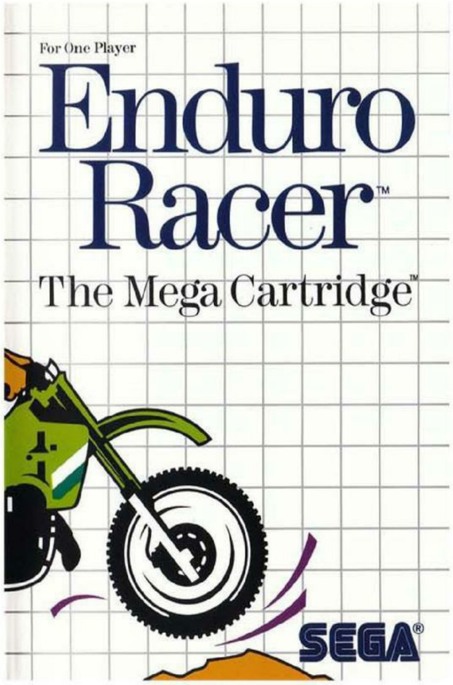
ENDURO RACER

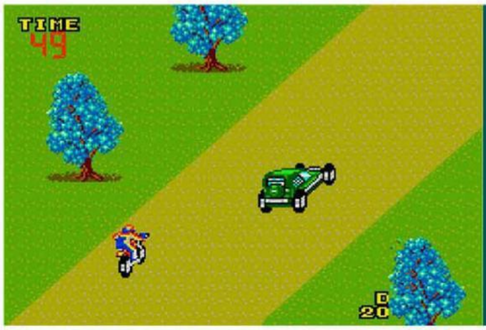
Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

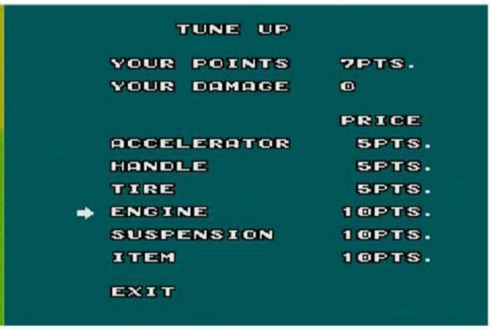
Genre: Racing
Players: 1

Enduro Racer
BEST TIME
10'00"00

Enduro Racer is Sega's answer to Nintendo's Excitebike. While not living up to the legendary status of Excitebike, this is still a solid arcade motocross racing game.


For One Player
Enduro
Racer™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®




TUNE UP

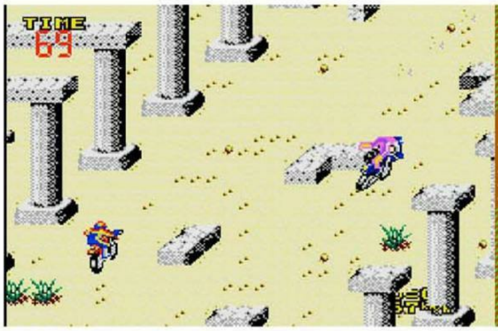
YOUR POINTS	7PTS.
YOUR DAMAGE	0
	PRICE
ACCELERATOR	5PTS.
HANDLE	5PTS.
TIRE	5PTS.
→ ENGINE	10PTS.
SUSPENSION	10PTS.
ITEM	10PTS.

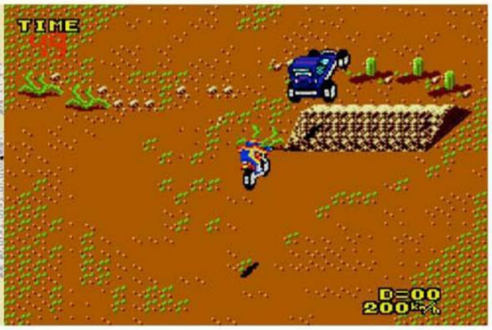
EXIT

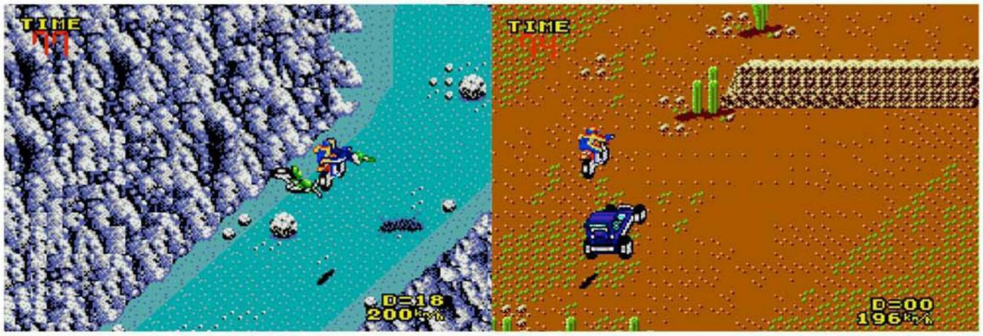
There are ten timed races to run though, each one filled with jumps, obstacles, and other racers on motorcycles and what looks to be 1930's gangster cars. Your goal is to survive those races, and given some of the races are held on the edge of a mountain and in a swamp, survive is the operative word.

The race takes place in a pseudo isometric view, so instead of running North/South or East/West, your are racing diagonally. This is good because it allows there to be more obstacles and racers on the track, however it can be frustrating at times since things can become hidden on the side of the screen. It's kind of hard to dodge a boulder when it suddenly appears in front of you.

Each race has a 60 second time limit, but there is carryover from the previous race. For example if you finish race number 1 with 8 seconds to spare, at the start of the next race you will have 68 seconds on the clock. If you are a competent racer at all time will never become a factor since by race 3 you will have 99 seconds on the clock. Of course that's not to say you will see the finish line in all ten races, since your bike can only take a limited amount of damage, and the damage carries over from race to race. Once your bike hits max damage the timer will begin to move at a much more rapid rate, pretty much guaranteeing that you won't see the finish line.

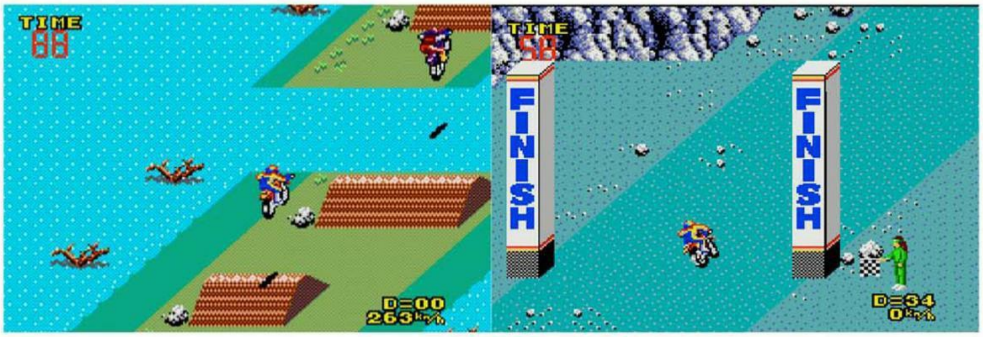


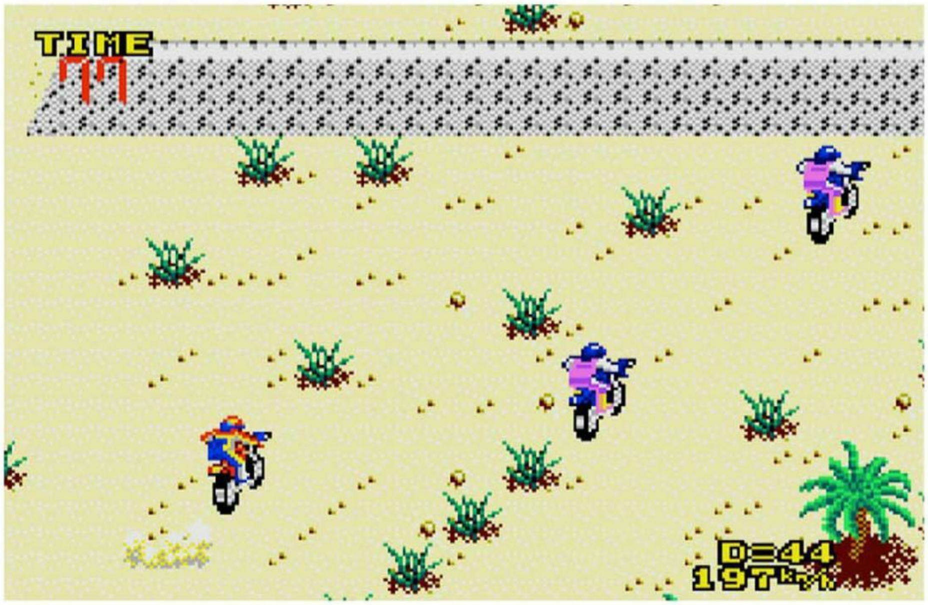




After each race you will be given your finish time, as well as being awarded a point for every car or motorcycle you passed. This is important since those points can be used to spruce up your bike for the next race. You can get new tires, a faster accelerator, or a supped up engine that raises your top speed. Most importantly though you can buy a repair kit, which reduces the damage your bike has endured. Unfortunately it only makes minimal repairs, and since it's the most expensive item you can get, at best you'll be able to purchase one of them per race (and that's assuming you forgo bike improvements).

There are ten races spread across five tracks. The first run through is fairly easy as there are not too many racers on the track, and for the most part they are courteous competitors. Once you hit race number 6 however the number of racers double and instead of being gentlemen they become reincarnated Kamikaze pilots whose only goal in life is to see you and your bike engulfed in flames.





The tracks have a surprising amount of jumps to them, which can be a bad thing if you just picked up the game and started playing. If you hit a jump and land your speed will be cut in half unless you pull off a perfectly timed maneuver that sends your bike flying through the air and landing without missing a beat. In the early stages it's easy to get into a rhythm and fly from jump to jump, however in the later races you must be careful with jumps since hitting one wrong means certain death. Take the swamp level for example. In certain parts you have to hit a jump, fly to the other side of the screen to hit another jump, and then fly back to the other side to land on solid ground. If you just jump straight ahead you will be swimming back to shore.

Outside of the jumps and obstacles, the track design is incredibly basic and repetitive. It's like the designers created a short section of track then hit copy and paste a handful of times to stretch out the length of the race. While it's not exactly a game killer, it doesn't make for the most interesting of races.

If you are a diehard arcade style racing fan, Enduro Racer is worth a shot since the graphics and music are decent, and the races are often fast paced and somewhat challenging in the later levels. However if you are looking for something with depth and replay value this probably isn't the title for you.

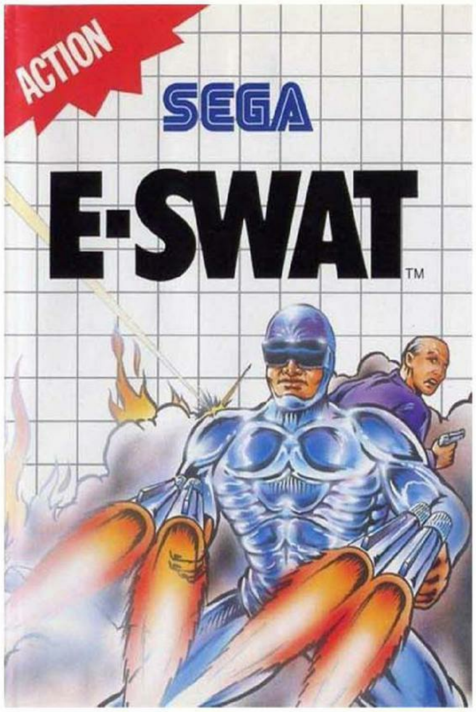
E-SWAT

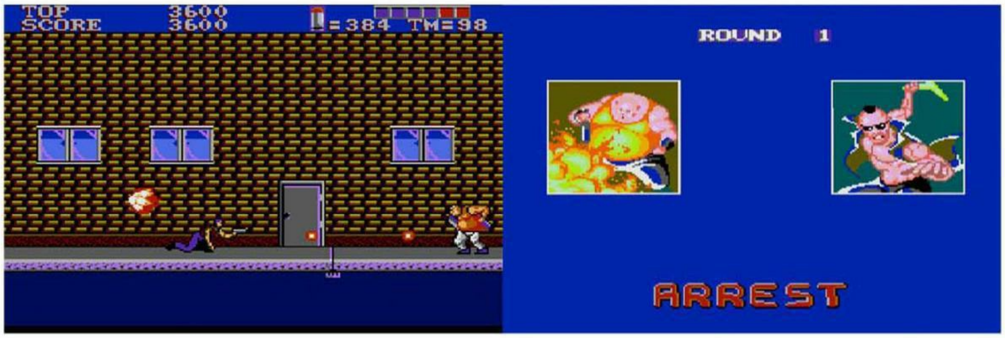
Release Date: 1990
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1

ESWAT TM
CITY UNDER SIEGE

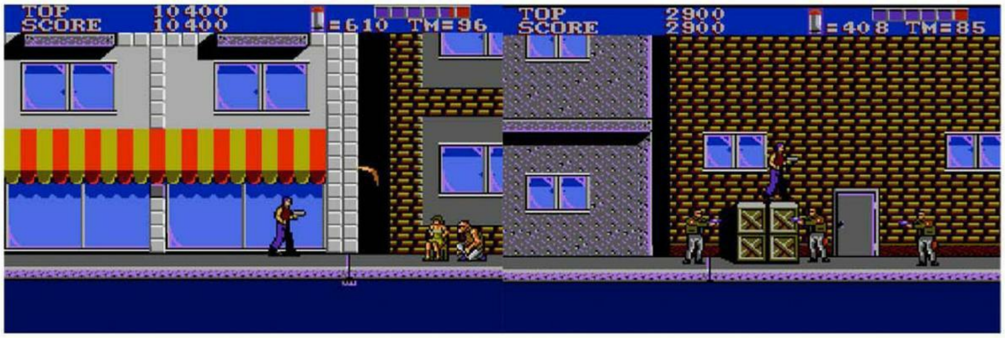
This is a scaled down version of the arcade and Genesis action platformer.


ACTION
SEGA
E-SWAT TM



Did I say scaled down? What I meant to say was it is essentially a sampler compared to the other versions. Not only are there only five levels instead of eight, the levels are much shorter and are fairly different to boot. Seriously, the game took me fifteen minutes to play from start to finish, and that included pausing in order to take notes.

The basic idea of the game is that you are a futuristic cop who is sent out to clean up the streets. Before they give you the heavy artillery they send you to an incredibly crime infested neighborhood to shoot thugs in the face and rescue a damsel in distress from a maniacal fire breathing fat man and a boomerang throwing coward who hides behind the woman who is tied to a chair. Now, even though at the beginning of the level your superiors instruct you to "arrest" these two wanted individuals, you apparently take that as a suggestion since you fill them with lead and leave them for dead. In fact, after shooting the boomerang guy ten times in the face you walk by the poor kidnap victim who is still in the chair, leaving her to fend for herself beside her now faceless kidnapper, essentially saying "sorry honey, I just got promoted".



TOP 18400
SCORE 18400
=4
=824
TM=91

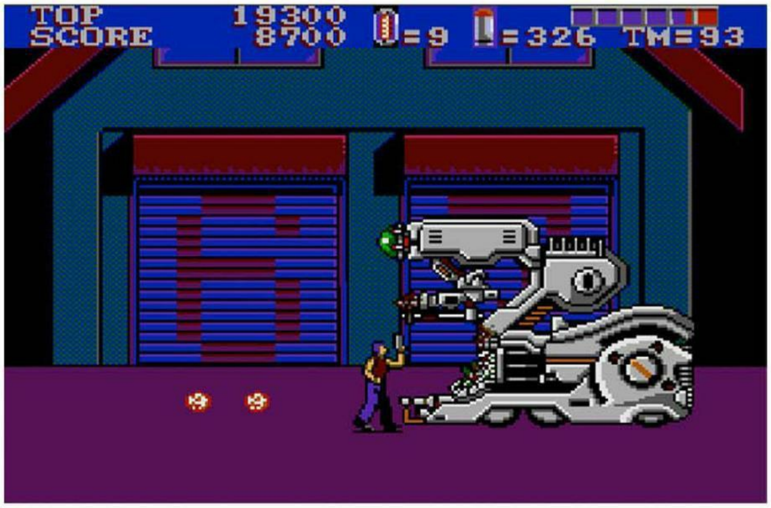
ROUND 2
ARREST

Now that you are heavily armed it's time to have some fun. Even though this is supposed to be state of the art armor, it falls apart if it's shot, rammed, or even touched by a random guy. Thankfully they did give you a machine gun and a ton of ammo, so even if your armor gets damaged I guarantee that the other guy got the worst of it. Plus as an added bonus when the top part of your armor breaks off you are still left with a stylish pair of metal boots.

Each of the five stages play out the same way. You walk from left to right killing everything in your path, you kill a mini-boss by using an insane number of bullets, you walk a little bit more killing indiscriminately along the way, then you face off against the main boss, again using an insane amount of firepower. It's almost like in the future the only bullet manufacturer is Nerf.

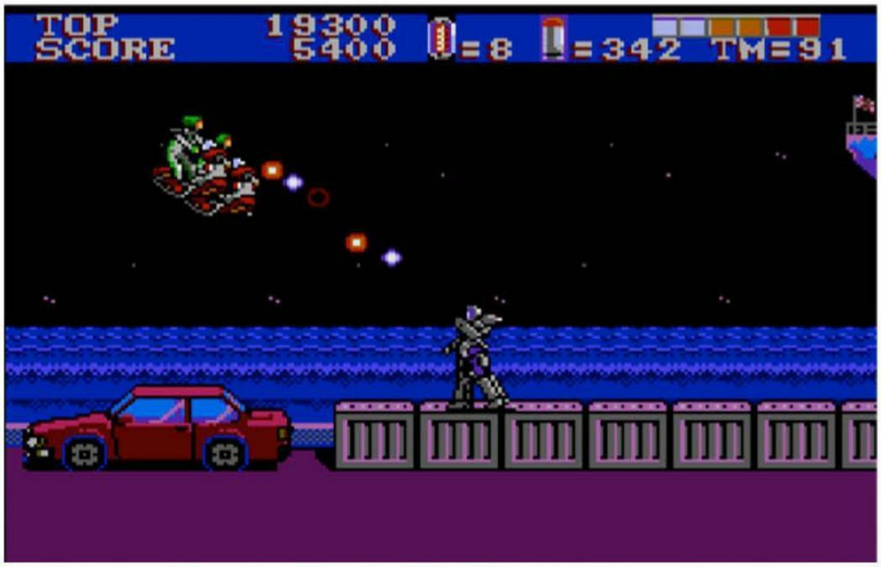
POLICE DEPARTMENT
ESWAT
CITY OF LIBERTY

TOP 19300
SCORE 19300
=4
=690
TM=78



I wish I could say the bosses were a challenge, but for the most part all they do is lumber across the screen to await your hail of gunfire. The only tense moments come into play when you have filled them with 300 rounds and they are still coming at you with their flamethrower or laser guns firing on all cylinders.

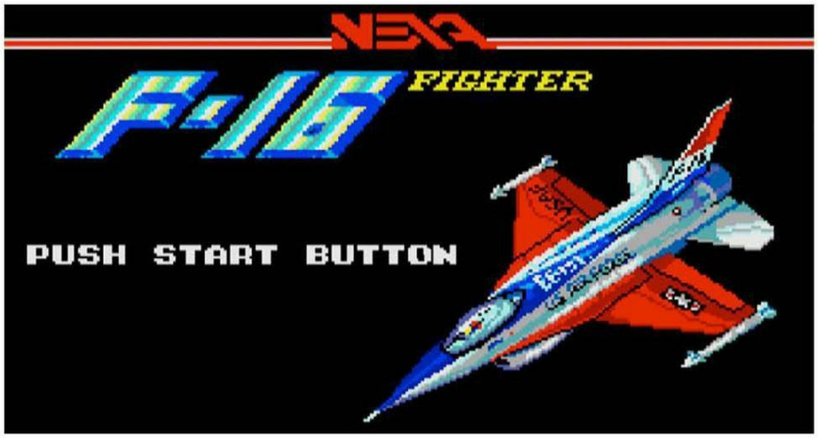
There's really not much else to E*Swat. If you have fifteen minutes to kill and want to wipe out the population of a small Midwestern Town you could do a whole lot worse. If you are looking for an in depth gaming experience you might want to look elsewhere.



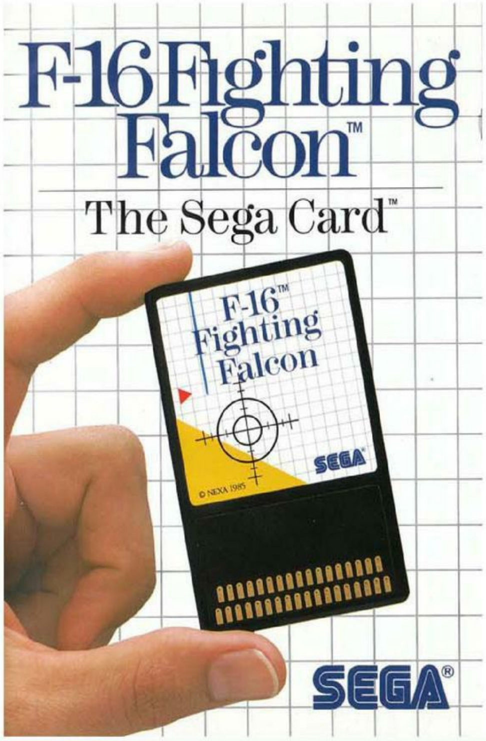
F-16 FIGHTING FALCON

Release Date: 1986
Developer: Nexa Corp
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Flying Sim
Players: 1

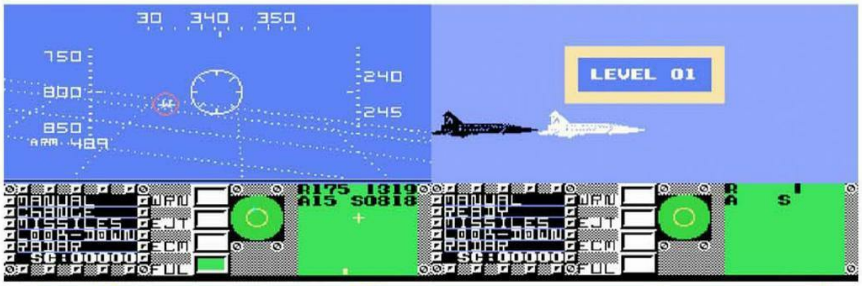

NEXA
F-16
FIGHTER
PUSH START BUTTON

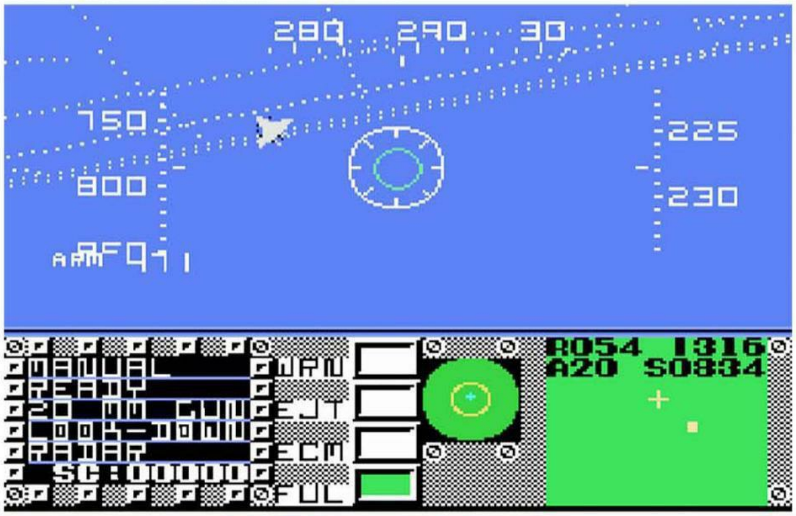
F-16 Fighting Falcon is a flight simulator for the Master System. Well, not exactly a flight simulator, more like a prime example of just how bad a game could be.

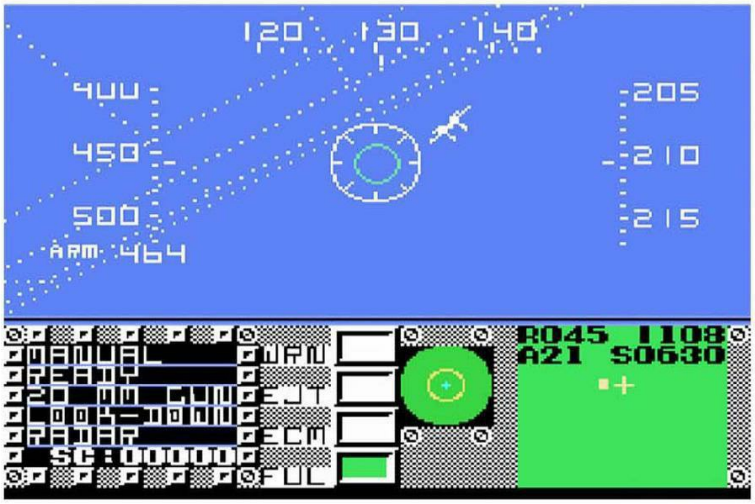

F-16 Fighting Falcon™
The Sega Card™
F-16™
Fighting
Falcon
SEGA
© NEXA 1985
SEGA®

The first thing that jumps out is that the graphics are on par with the Atari 2600. The sky is blue, which is understandable since the sky is actually blue. For some reason though the ground is also blue, with only some white dotted lines letting you know it is in fact, the ground. This gets incredibly dull to look at very, very quickly. Also, the enemy fighters are nothing more than solid grey or white outlines of a plane. No detail, no nothing.

The biggest problem with the game however is that you need two controllers in order to play it. Unlike some Master System games which needed the second controller to pull up an inventory screen, F-16 Fighting Falcon uses the entire second controller to control the plane. One controller affects your movement, while the other controller is your speed. One controller lets you change weapons and fire, but the other is needed in order to confirm a lock on. Basically the only way to play this game is if you have monkey feet and can effectively use a controller with said monkey feet. There's nothing wrong with being ambitious with the game design, but when the ambition trumps common sense you might want to rethink your strategy as a designer.

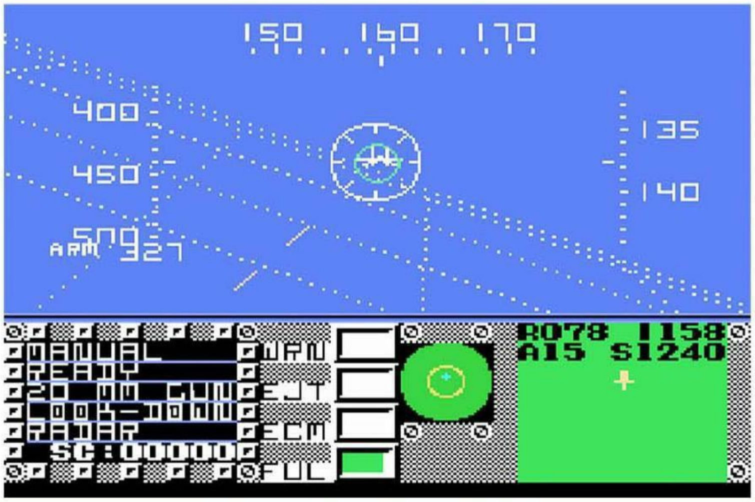

30 340 350
750
800
850
240
245
LEVEL 01
R175 1319
A15 S0818


280 290 30
750
800
225
230
MANUAL
READY
20 MM GUN
LOOK-DOWN
RADAR
SC:000000
WPN
EJT
ECM
FUL
R054 1316
A20 S0834


120 130 140
400
450
500
ARM 464
205
210
215
MANUAL
READY
20 MM GUN
LOOK-DOWN
RADAR
SC:000000
WRN
EJT
ECM
FUL
R045 I108
A21 S0630

Each level has you facing off against enemy Mig aircraft. Depending on the level you can find yourself facing off against anywhere from a single Mig to a trio of them. You have a very limited supply of ammo, so you have to make sure you line up your shots just right. Making this job most difficult is the controls respond with a two second lag time. Now I don't know about you, but if I'm in a jet going 600 miles per hour while taking enemy fire, the first thing I might insist on would be responsive controls.

The game has ten levels, but I suspect only the most masochistic players out there will ever see past level two since the game is slow, difficult, and ugly. Play only if you want to question how this game got past the play testing stage and released to the general public.

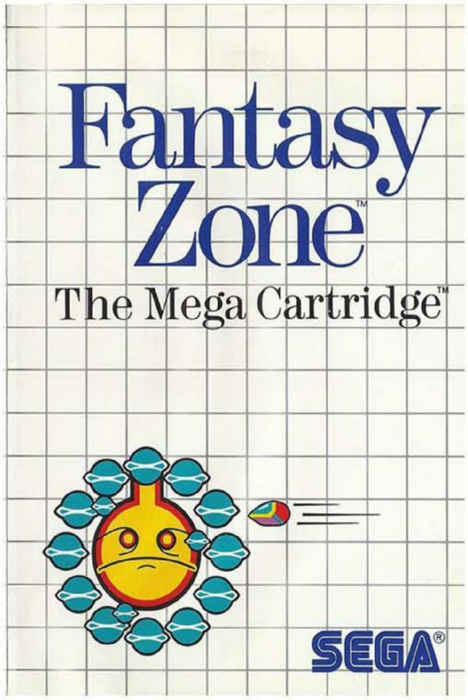

150 160 170
400
450
500
ARM 327
135
140
MANUAL
READY
20 MM GUN
LOOK-DOWN
RADAR
SC:000000
WRN
EJT
ECM
FUL
R078 I158
A15 S1240

FANTASY ZONE

Release Date: 1986
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Shmup
Players: 1-2

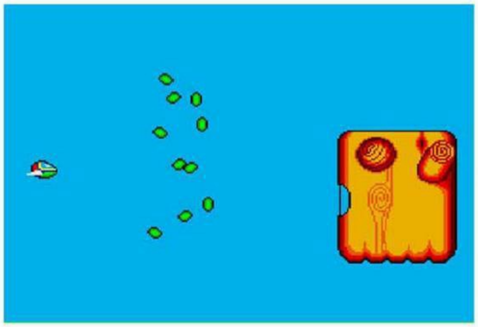
Despite looking cute and colorful, Fantasy Zone is one of the most challenging games for the Master System.


Fantasy Zone™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

You are in control of an egg shaped ship called the Opa-Opa and are tasked with destroying every single living thing that comes across your path. These things comes in many different shapes and sizes, ranging from cute blue aliens to what looks like flying severed dog heads to heavily armored alien ships. These enemies come at you from every direction thanks to the fact that the level is free flowing, which allows you to scroll left or right. It very much has the feel of Defender to it, although with less human kidnapping.

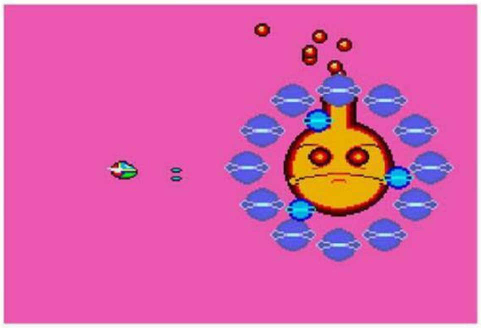
The levels play out in the same basic way. You must hunt down and destroy all of the enemy generating bases before taking on a massive boss. The bases can take a lot of punishment before being destroyed, and usually require you to do a couple dive bombing runs at them before they blow up. They are spread out all over the level, although they are very obvious and easy to spot. They don't really have much of a defense outside of requiring a few hits to destroy and spawning of the occasional enemy, and aren't really much of a threat.

The bosses on the other hand fill up the screen with bullets and require a small arsenals worth of ammo to destroy. Sadly the bosses aren't that creative. The first boss is nothing more than a giant block of wood that had a hole that spits out dozens of bullets at a time. The second boss looks like an evil chemistry beaker that rains down destruction from above.



TOP 30400 7.WAY 13 RD. 2
$ 550 1.BOMB

TOP 8500 SHOT RD. 1
$ 2800 2.BOMBS



TOP
$
0
0
SHOT
1.BOMB
RD. 6

TOP
$
0
0
SHOT
1.BOMB
RD. 5

The bosses aren't overly difficult, but do require some precise flying to avoid become rubble. If you die however you will be sent back to the beginning of the fight instead of reappearing to continue the fight, which can lead to a fair amount of frustration, especially if you used up your special weapons during the fight.

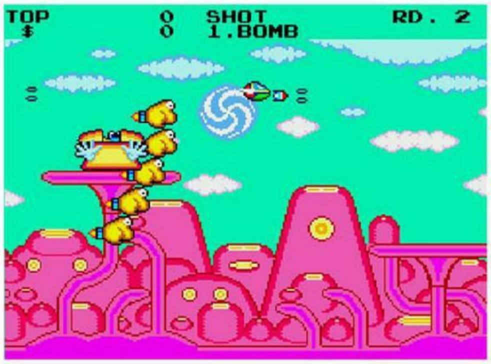
(Side Note: There is a near full proof strategy when it comes to the vast majority of the bosses, and it comes in the form of Heavy Bombs. Basically these things are like 2-ton Acme brand anvils that fall from the sky and crush anything that is below them. They are so effective that they can kill most bosses in a single hit, which to be honest takes away a lot of the challenge to the game. If you are playing for fun I suggest skipping this option, however if you are stuck and want to get by a boss, drop an anvil on its head and move on.)

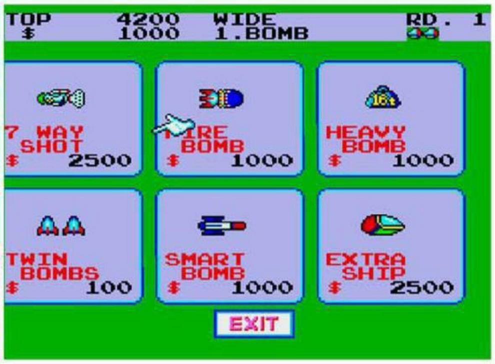
Speaking of special weapons, there are a fair amount of them here. Unlike a lot of games in the genre, you don't have to rely on random enemies dropping powerups. Instead most enemies drop cash that you can spend at the shop that randomly appears as you fly through each level. In the shop you can buy everything from multi-shot weapons to more powerful bombs to engines that makes your ship fly faster. You can also buy extra ships, which is important since the game doesn't allow you to continue. The downside to the special weapons is that once activated they only last a short amount of time or have limited ammo. Of course in a way it's a good thing because some of those weapons turn you into an unstoppable killing machine, and having them as permanent upgrades would make the game far too easy.

The final level is a departure from the standard "destroy all bases" objective, and instead has you facing off against every single boss in the game back to back, which is easier said than done considering that you don't have any continues.

Everything about this game is solid, the controls, the graphics, the music. There is a reason that this is one of the "killer-apps" on the Master System.

Fun fact. A mini-game version of the first level shows up in, of all places, Arnold Palmers Tournament Golf for the Genesis. In order to reach it you must hit 100 strokes on a single hole then enter the Konami Code on the game over screen.





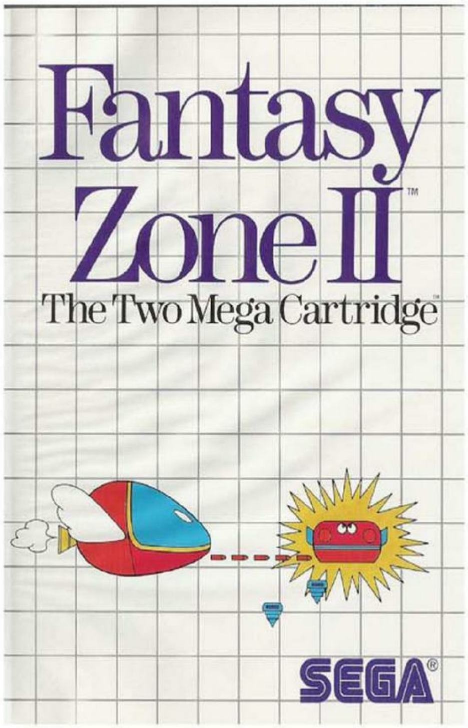
FANTASY ZONE 2

Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Shmup
Players: 1-2

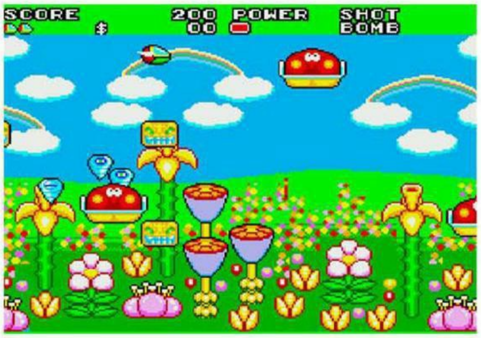
Fantasy Zone II
The tears of OPA-OPA

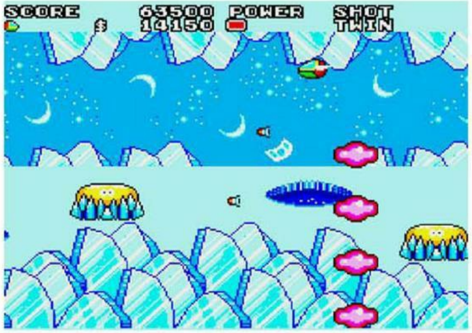
The middle entry into the Fantasy Zone trilogy on the Master System is the perfect example on what a sequel should be. The core gameplay from the original is intact, yet there are enough new wrinkles thrown in to make the game stand up on its own.

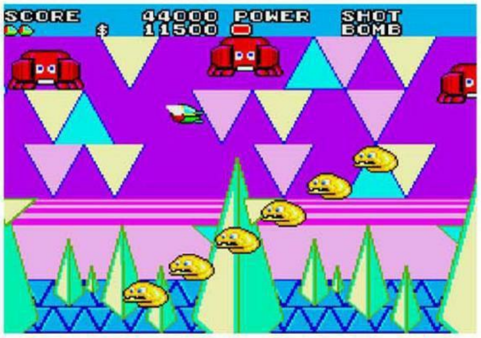

Fantasy Zone II
The Two Mega Cartridge
SEGA

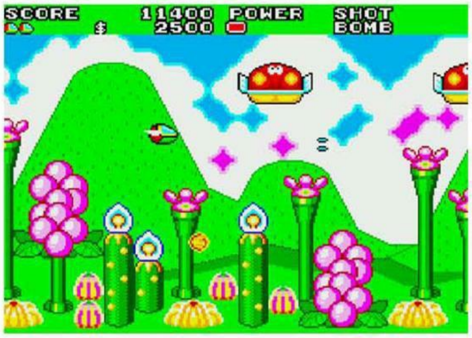
If you played the original you will be right at home with the sequel. You once again control your egg shaped ship the Opa-Opa as you set out to destroy every single living thing that comes across your path. This time around though there are many more things to hunt down and kill (and many more things hunting you down as well). Also the same basic premise is kept in that you must fly around and destroy all the enemy spawning bases before facing off with a massive boss.

The same free form levels are there (meaning you can fly to the left or to the right), however this time around there are multiple screens per level that are connected via warp zones that appear whenever you destroy the bases. During the beginning levels there are only a handful of screens to find, so it's easy to pick the correct warp and wipe out your enemies. A few levels in however more screens are added and it becomes possible (and probable) that you will get lost in the maze of warp zones. It would have been nice if the warp zones had any indication of where they went instead of all being the same color (the final red warp zone that takes you to the boss notwithstanding), but at the end of the day it's nothing more than a minor inconvenience.









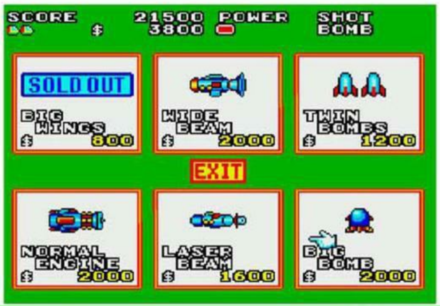
SCORE
19400
POWER
SHOT
$
1500
TWIN

SCORE
73200
POWER
SHOT
$
20600
TWIN

The enemies this time around are much more plentiful and much more aggressive than in the original. You will constantly have to move as the screen is constantly filled with things that aim to kill you. There are kamikaze ships flying in formation right at you, groups of ships that line up from the top to the bottom of the screen before shooting in unison, and for some reason there are squadrons of flying snow penguins roaming around. Thankfully everything (except for the bases) dies in a single shot, so as long as you never stop firing you have a fighting chance.

(Side Note: While the constant action is a lot of fun, there is one infuriating thing that brings it down a notch. Often times there will be a base at the top of the screen, which is problematic since it means you have to hug the roof in order to destroy it. Far too often when you are doing this enemies will randomly appear from above and destroy you with no warning. While it doesn't break the game by any means, it will lead to the occasional thrown controller moment).

Stores are once again present, except this time instead of randomly falling from the sky during the level, they are at a fixed location. This is good since if you are a little short of cash for that giant laser canon you can go back out and gun down a few more enemies to pick up some extra cash (which comes in two form, coins and foldin' money). Unlike the original however each store has a small selection of goods that changes from shop to shop. There are even hidden shops in later levels that have special gear for you to purchase.

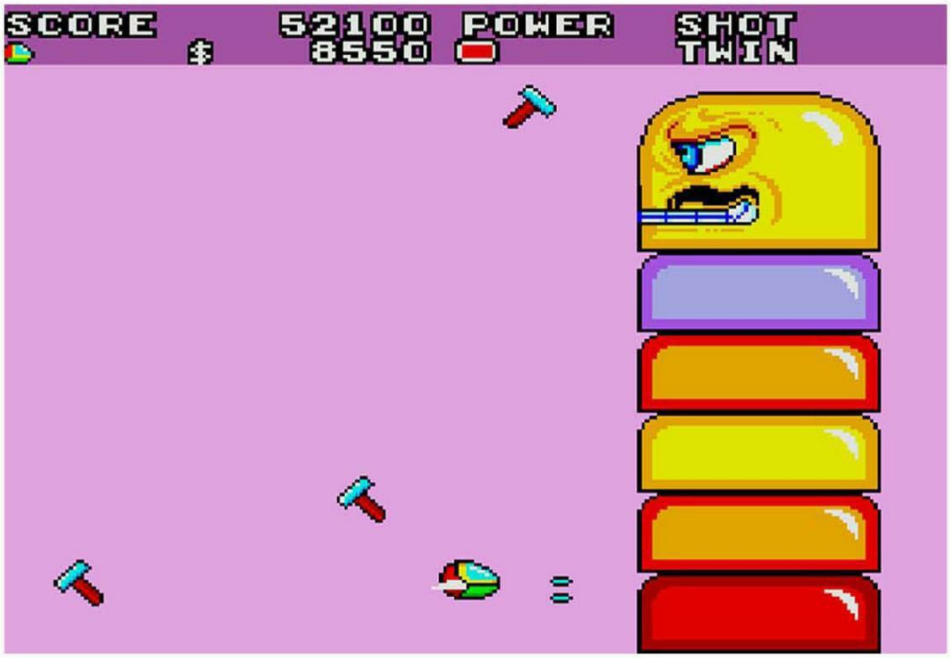

SCORE
21500
POWER
SHOT
$
3800
BOMB
SOLD OUT
BIG WINGS
$ 800
WIDE BEAM
$ 2000
TWIN BOMBS
$ 1200
EXIT
NORMAL ENGINE
$ 2000
LASER BEAM
$ 1600
BIG BOMB
$ 2000

SCORE
17100
POWER
SHOT
$
3000
BOMB
SHOP

Once you have successfully navigated the maze like structure of the levels, destroyed all of the necessary bases, gotten ship upgrades at the shop, and found the appropriate red warp zone, it's time to take on the boss. Much like the original, the bosses here are just plain weird. The first level is a sentient block of wood that throws logs at you, but the second boss is head scratching to say the least. The boss takes up the entire screen and is a 6 layered bullet shaped hatchet throwing bad guy with a creepy grin and a mustache. What it lacks in logic it makes up for in awesome.

There are a few changes regarding your ship that are quite welcome. For starters you now have a health bar instead of having one hit deaths. You only start out with one bar, but with some searching you can find items to that gives you extras, but also refills them. The store bought power ups are also handled differently this time around, as some of them are permanent upgrades rather than temporary. Granted not all of the weapons are permanent, but enough of them are to give you a sustained fighting chance rather than a short burst of fury.

All told, Fantasy Zone 2 is one of the rare times in entertainment history where the sequel surpasses the original.

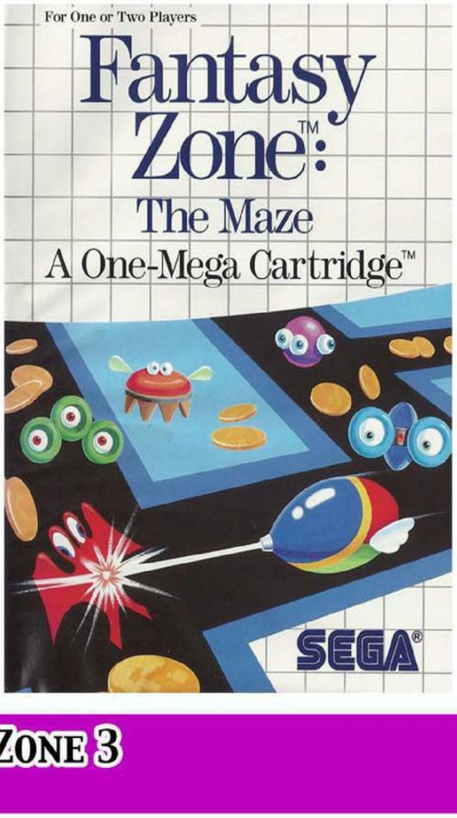


FANTASY ZONE 3

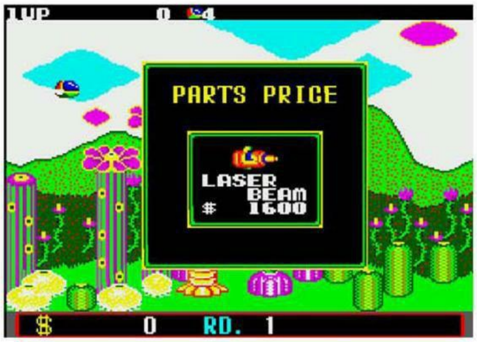
Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

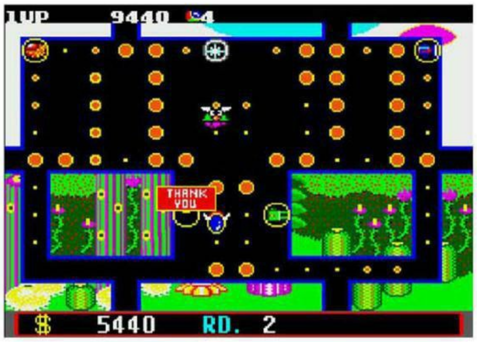
Genre: Shmup
Players: 1-2

FANTASY ZONE
THE MAZE


For One or Two Players
Fantasy Zone™:
The Maze
A One-Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

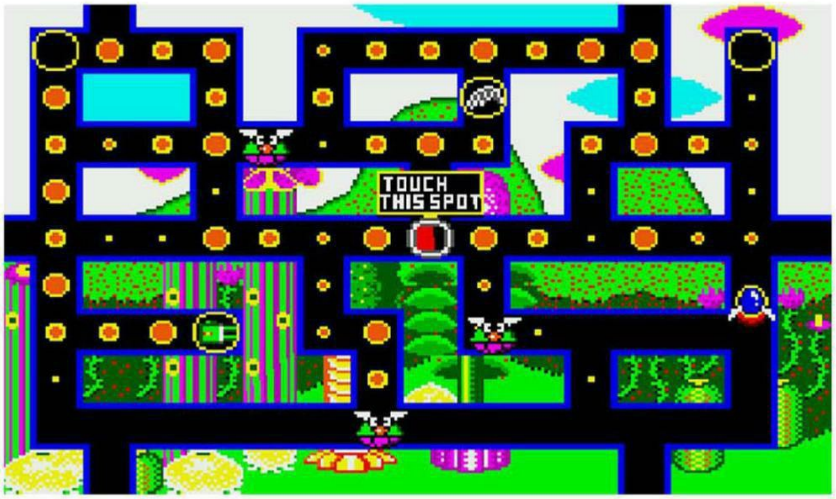
If Fantasy Zone 2 was a prime example of how to properly do a sequel, then Fantasy Zone 3 is a prime example of how not to do a sequel. Honestly, this is more of a spin-off than it is a part of the series.

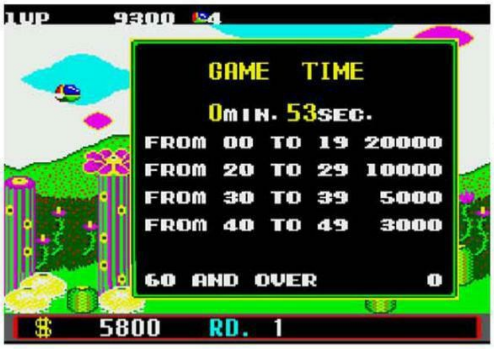




The first thing you'll notice about Fantasy Zone 3 is that outside of the Opa-Opa ship, there is virtually nothing connecting it to the previous entries in the series. Gone is the fast paced shooter action, the giant bosses, the never ending stream of enemies trying to end your life by filling the screen with so many bullets that you can't dodge them, the shops filled with new and deadly weapons, and honestly, gone is any semblance of fun. In place of all of that is a really bad Pac-Man/Clu Clu Land hybrid that just happens to have a Fantasy Zone theme to it.

At the start of the game you'll get the option to pick your starting world. Each world is made up of several stages and finishes off with a bonus level of sorts that has you wandering around a darkened maze to pick up extra money. Basically if you are playing the game for the very first time and want to last a while I suggest starting out with the first world. If you want to have any chance at beating the game go ahead and skip to the very last world and have at it (since thanks to a few rather significant design flaws only the hardest of the hardcore will be able to start from scratch and make it to the end).

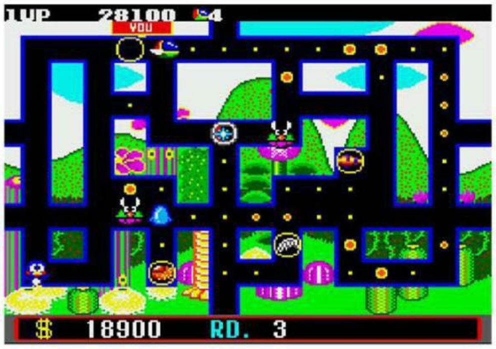




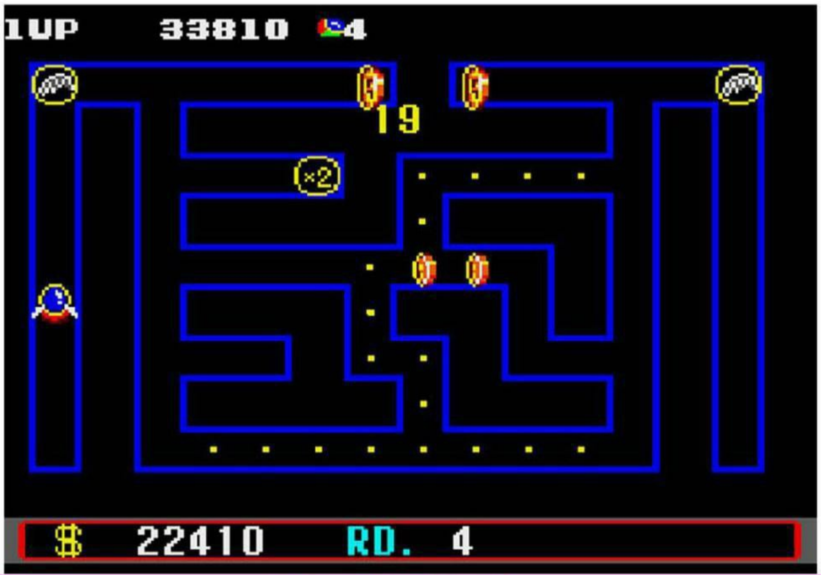
GAME TIME

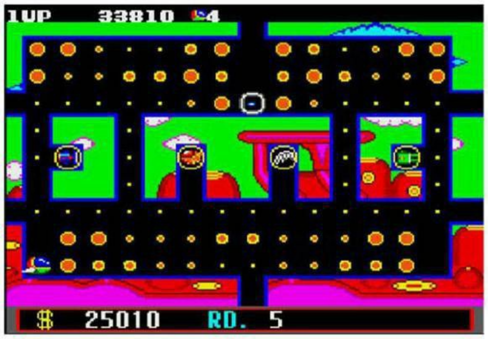
0MIN. 53SEC.

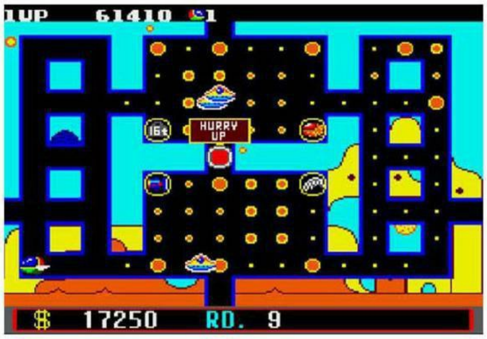
FROM 00 TO 19 20000
FROM 20 TO 29 10000
FROM 30 TO 39 5000
FROM 40 TO 49 3000
60 AND OVER 0

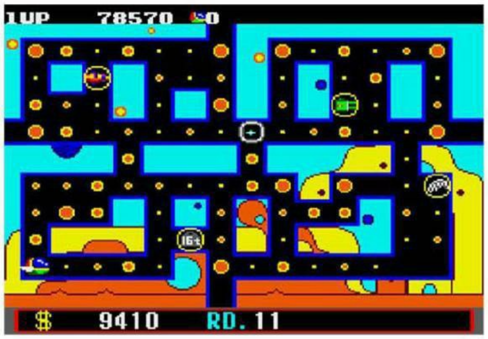


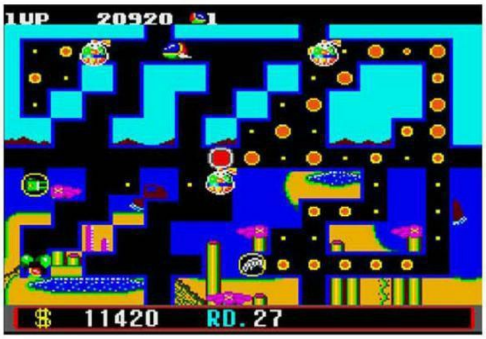
Before each stage begins you will be given a rundown of everything that will be "for sale' during the level. As in past games these items range from speed boosts to weapons, and sadly just as in past games they have an incredibly short timer. When the level begins there will be powerup icons spread out that you can fly over to "purchase", which frankly is kind of a dumb play mechanic. For starters your ship starts off so slow that you basically have to crawl across the stage to get a temporary speed boost, and secondly it is far too easy to accidentally purchase an item while evading enemies or just trying to get the last coin to clear the level. And oh yeah, for some reason they decided to make it so every time you purchase an item, it goes up in price. This means that since you will have to buy something on every single level in order to survive (speed burst, weapon, etc) that by the time you reach the end of the game you aren't going to be able to afford much of anything.











The stages are all mazes that are filled with coins that must be collected before moving on. There is also a spawn point for enemies that will not only kick out a few at the start of the level, but will also have a meter that fills up rather quickly. If you don't make the effort to go by and touch the sensor every five seconds or so it will send out an orb that creates ultra quick enemies that will hunt you down. In the early going this isn't that big of a deal since the level layouts are pretty decent, however when you get higher in levels the corridors get much tighter and there are fewer paths, so not only is it more difficult to reach the spawn point, it is nearly impossible to get away from the enemies. Also in the later levels the spawn point kicks out a ridiculous amount of enemies, so if you are playing the game straight through you will not only be faced with tight pathways, an unmanageable number of enemies, but also the lack of funds to actually buy powerups to allow you to shoot or escape from the enemies.

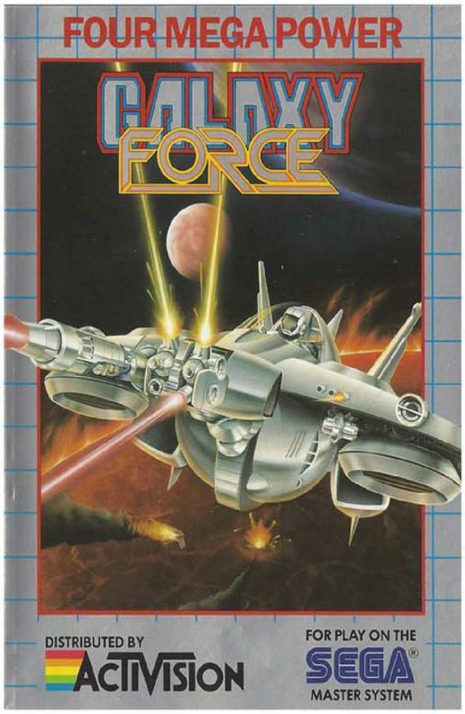
Sadly that's about all the game has to offer. It's really a shame because the first two entries into the series are classics, and this one is essentially the black sheep of the family.

GALAXY FORCE

Release Date: 1989
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Activision

Genre: Action - Flying
Players: 1

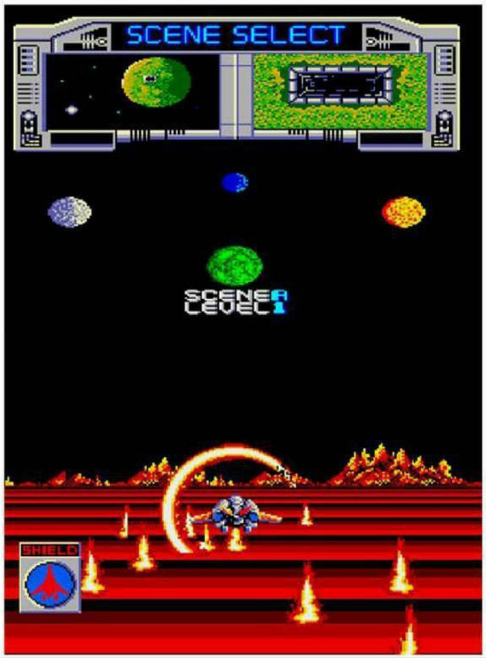
GALAXY
FORCE

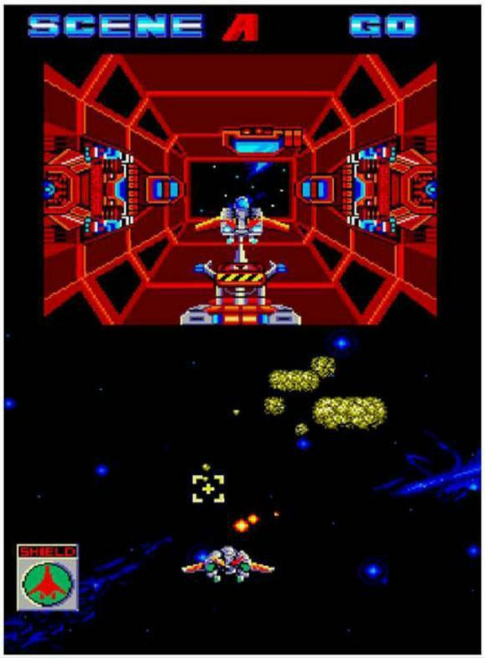

FOUR MEGA POWER
GALAXY
FORCE
DISTRIBUTED BY
ACTIVISION
FOR PLAY ON THE
SEGA
MASTER SYSTEM

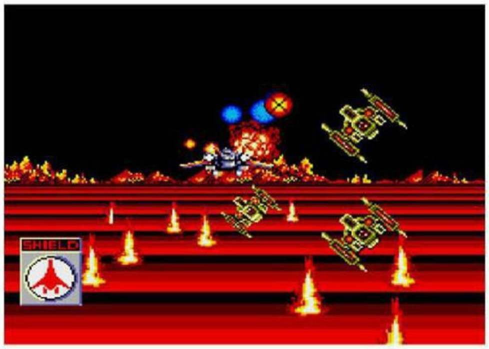
Galaxy Force is one of the most technically advanced and graphically impressive games on the Master System. It really does a great job of showing off the true power of the system.

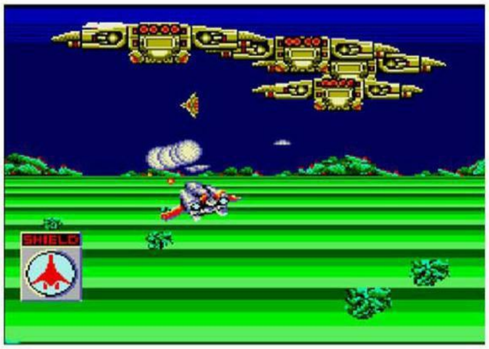
The premise of the game is simple, fly your heavily armed ship through an armada of enemies, find their base and destroy the entire planet that its on. Granted destroying the whole planet may seem like overkill, but after surviving the onslaught it's very satisfying to see the entire planet blow up Death Star style. The levels are broke up into two different sections. The first part has you making your suicide run across a hostile environment, and the second part has you flying through a series of narrow corridors inside the enemy base.

The first part of the levels borrows heavily from After Burner in terms of gameplay. You fly in one direction while ship after ship flies across your path for you to shoot down, and there are a healthy amount of ships flying at you firing missiles at you. Sadly the ships and the missiles are the least threatening thing to you, and are little more than annoying nuisances when compared to your real enemy, the environment. In most of the levels the natural elements will cause more death and destruction than anything else. In the first level you are flying through a massive asteroid belt, in the fourth level it's tornados, but by far the most infuriating is the second level where you are flying through what looks like a sea of fire. You will spend the bulk of you time on that level dodging fire pillars, ducking under flame waves, and watching helplessly as fireballs rain down upon your ship. It's a shame really, because the frustration that is inflicted by these inanimate objects really detracts from the game.

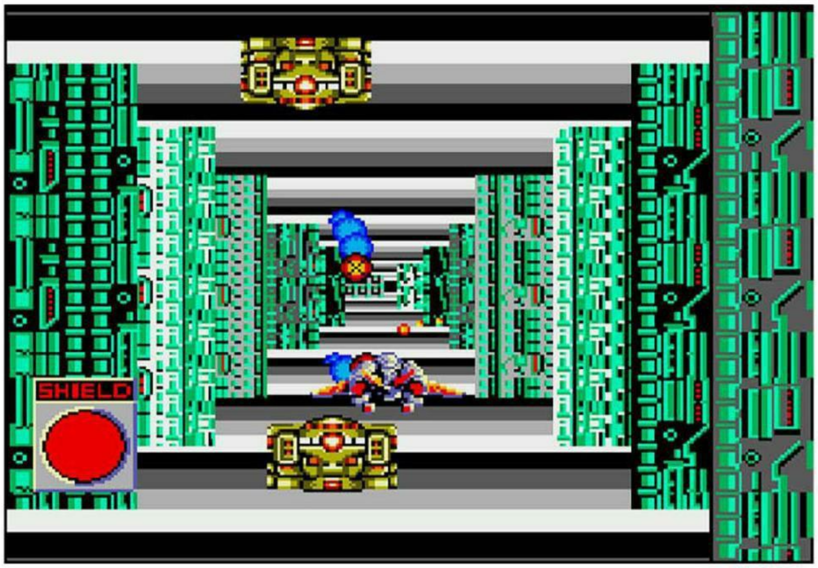






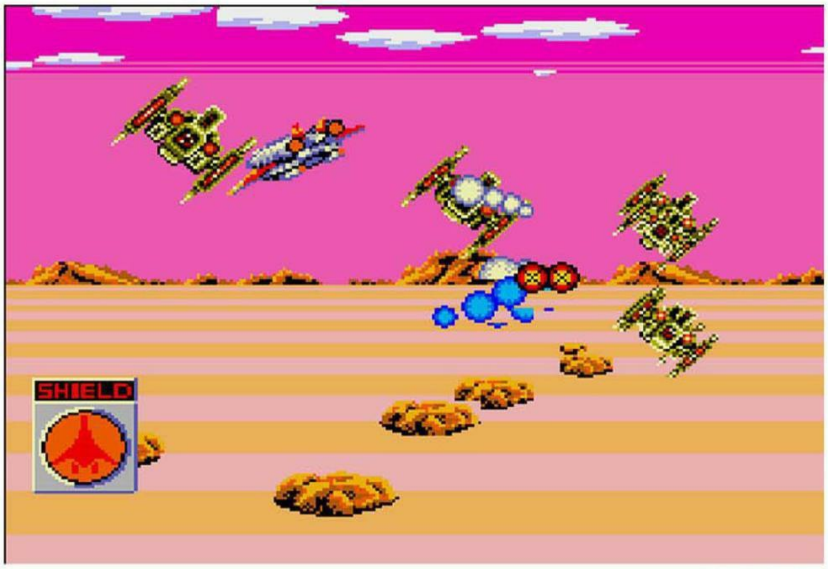


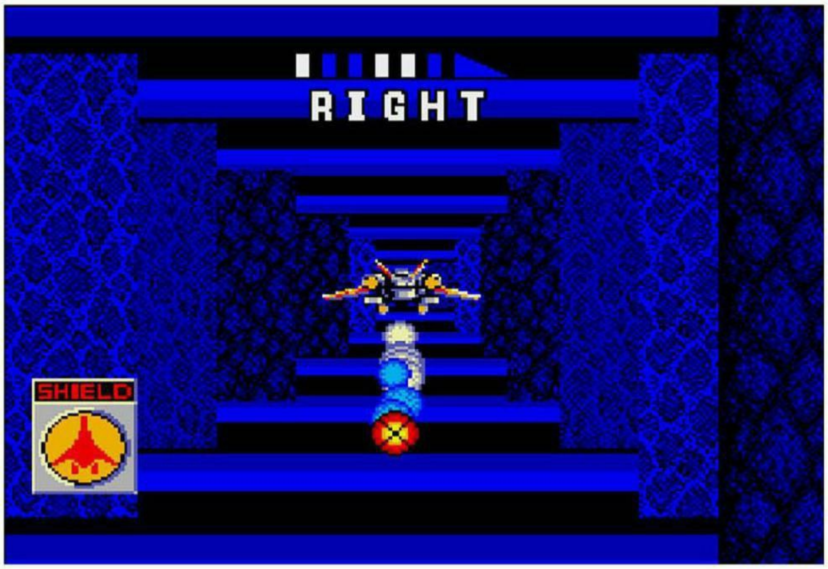
If by some miracle you survive the environment and make it to the base, you will be greeted with a new level of frustration. The first thing you'll wonder when you enter the base is "what kind of interior decorator decided it would be a good idea to have constantly flashing walls." I mean it really looks like your nemesis is a techno DJ who is trying to defeat you by causing a seizure. Of course if you don't die via seizure you will most certainly die by crashing into the walls. As you fly through the base you will be given "left or right" directions at the top of the screen just before having to make a precise hairpin turn. I say precise because if you are off by an inch in either direction you will bounce off the wall like a super ball and usually be thrown right into another wall. Even after much practice it is still difficult to pull off since the margin of error is so very small. If you are successful in navigating the base the entire planet explodes. Which is odd considering you never fire a shot into a reactor or face off with some sort of boss. Just the simple act of flying through the base causes destruction.



The saving grace of all this chaos is that your ship has a shield instead of one-hit deaths that are usually present within the genre. Granted this only prolongs your inevitable death, but it's still a nice change of pace.

If you are a fan of the genre then Galaxy Force will be right up your alley. Although I believe everyone should check it out to get a good example of just how powerful the Master System Hardware really was.

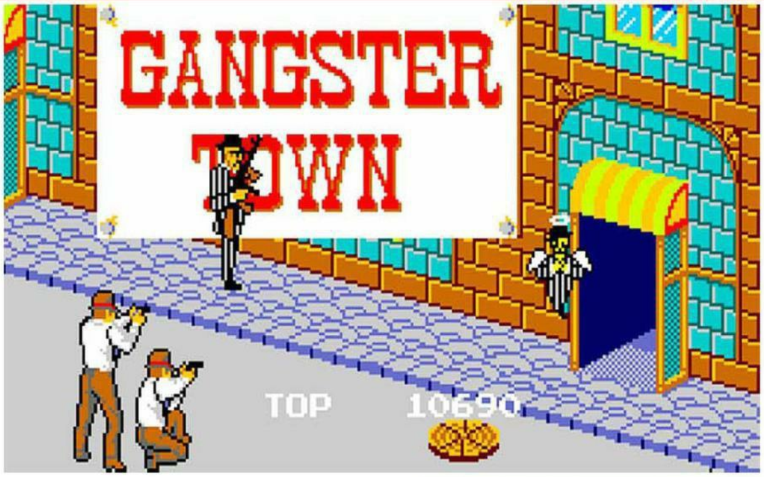




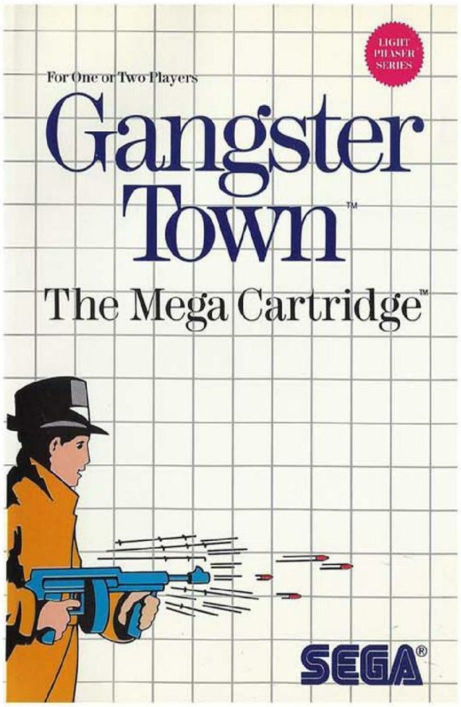
GANGSTER TOWN

Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Light Gun Shooter
Players: 1-2

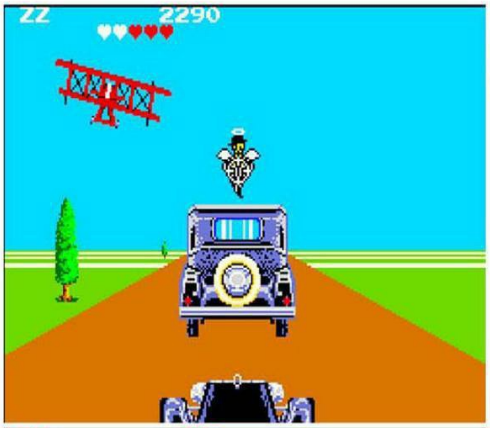

GANGSTER
TOWN
TOP 10690

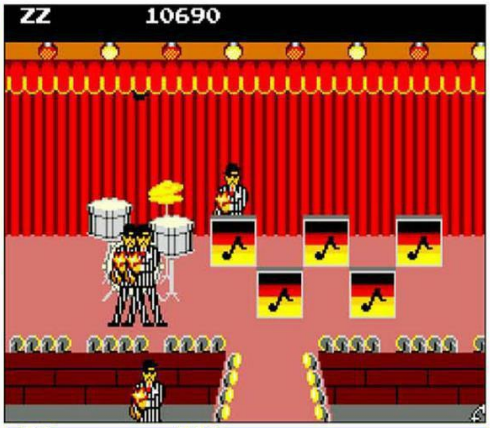
Gangster Town is one of only a handful of light gun games for the Master System. Thankfully for fans of the genre, this is also one of the better ones from the era.

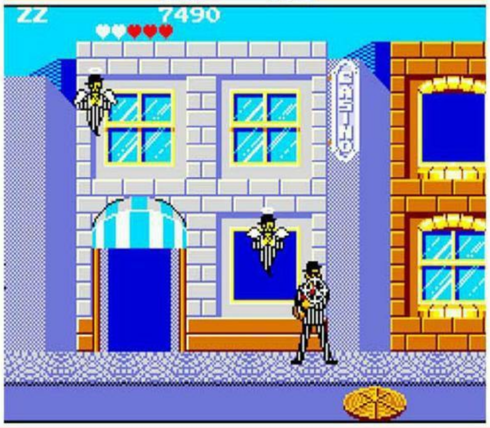

LIGHT PHASER SERIES
For One or Two Players
Gangster Town™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

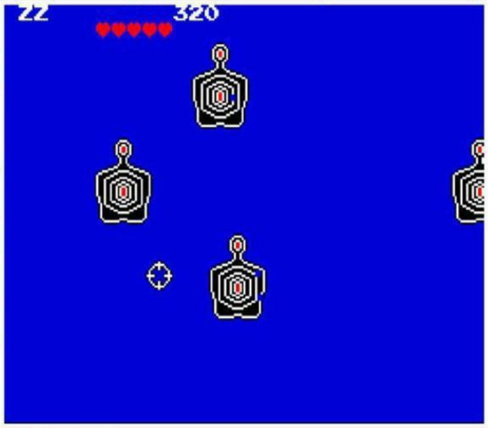
The premise is simple. You are armed with a magic handgun that never runs out of ammo or needs to be reloaded and you are set out to gun down every single gangster within the city limits. And it's a good thing you have a magic handgun because there is a never ending stream of gangsters to shoot. For added fun when you shoot one of them they turn into a little gangster angel who starts to float up to heaven, and since they are bad guys who shouldn't be headed towards the pearly gates you can shoot them again to send their souls to a much darker place. Which when you think about it is kind of a really cold move on your part.

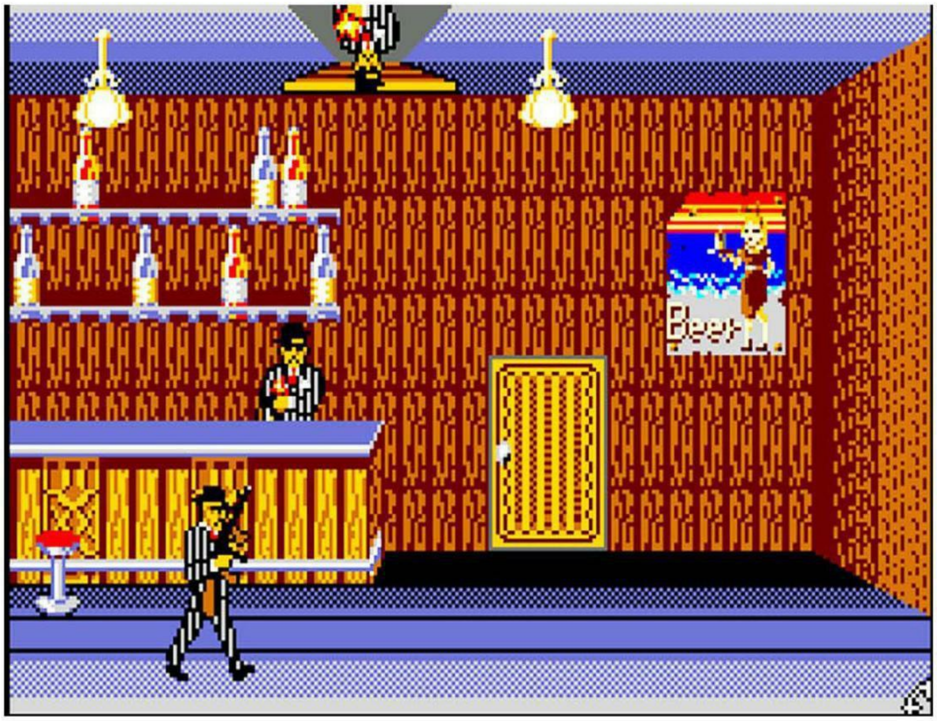
The game begins with a warmup target practice session with multiple standard issue targets moving back and forth for you to shoot. It is important that you shoot and shoot well during this warmup because if you cross certain thresholds (i.e. hit percentage, points, etc) you go up a health level for the next stage. This is actually a theme on every stage, so always make sure you shoot anything and everything as much and as accurately as you can.











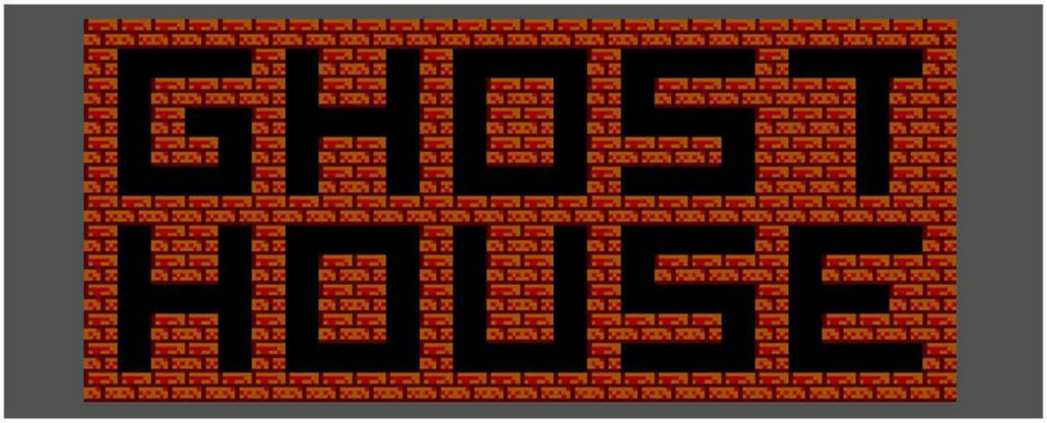
The first level has you in hot pursuit of a carload of gangsters. Well, it's more of a clown car full of gangsters as it seems like twenty of them pop out in order to shoot you. Once you chase them for a while you end up in Gangsterville USA, where apparently every guy with a pinstripe suit and a tommy gun has set up shop. From there it's just a leisurely stroll down main street while you fire more rounds than in a John Woo movie, until eventually you kill enough generic henchmen to gain the attention of a boss who comes out to greet you. After killing him it's time to move on to the next level, which plays out exactly the same as the city level with the slaughter of faceless henchmen before taking on a boss that looks identical to the one you just killed.

There are six levels in total (including the car chase) so there will be plenty of guys to kill. It is by no means deep or lengthy as a single play through can be completed in well under ten minutes. There are a couple of bonus stages that have you shooting a wall in search of a hidden key, but it doesn't really add anything to the game. That said, if you are looking for a simple stress reliever after a long day at the office, this is a pretty good way to go. Especially if you are lucky enough to have two light guns so you can bring a buddy along (or if you don't have a friend and just want to go all John Woo on the gangsters).

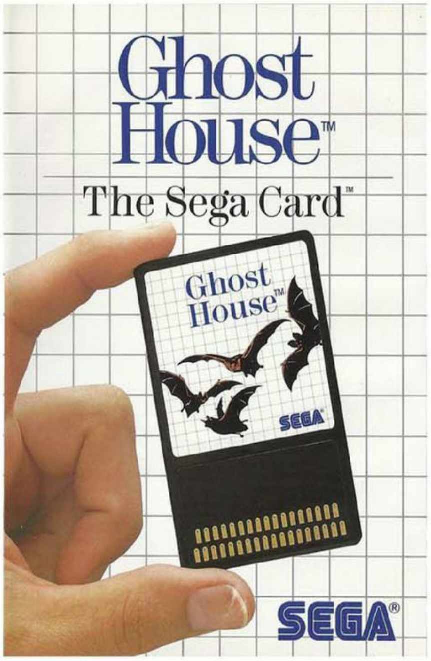
GHOST HOUSE

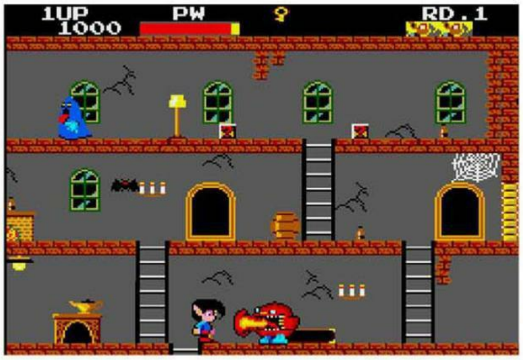
Release Date: 1986
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

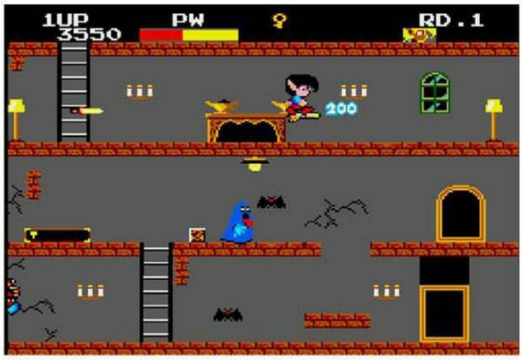
Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1-2


GHOST
HOUSE

In this simplistic yet occasionally frustrating action platformer you control Mick, an Eddie Munster lookalike who has taken it upon himself to break into a giant mansion and kill the five Draculas.

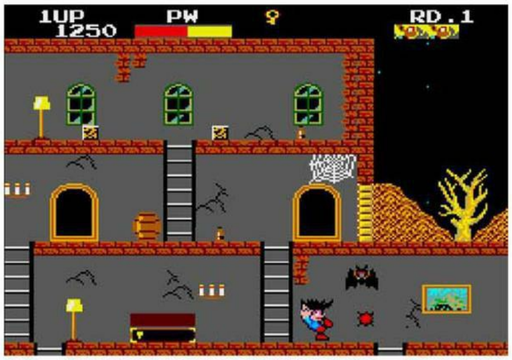

Ghost
House™
The Sega Card™
Ghost
House™
SEGA
SEGA®

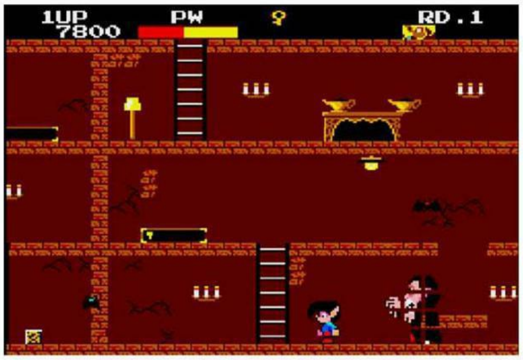




Each level plays out the same way. You start in roughly the same position in the house and have to fight your way through until one of the monsters drops a key. Once that happens you wander over to one of the five caskets that are scattered about and unleash a Dracula. Once defeated you lose your key, and must repeat the process until all five of the Draculas have been killed. This opens a door to the next level, which unfortunately is designed pretty much the exact same way, just with different monsters and a different color sky/background.

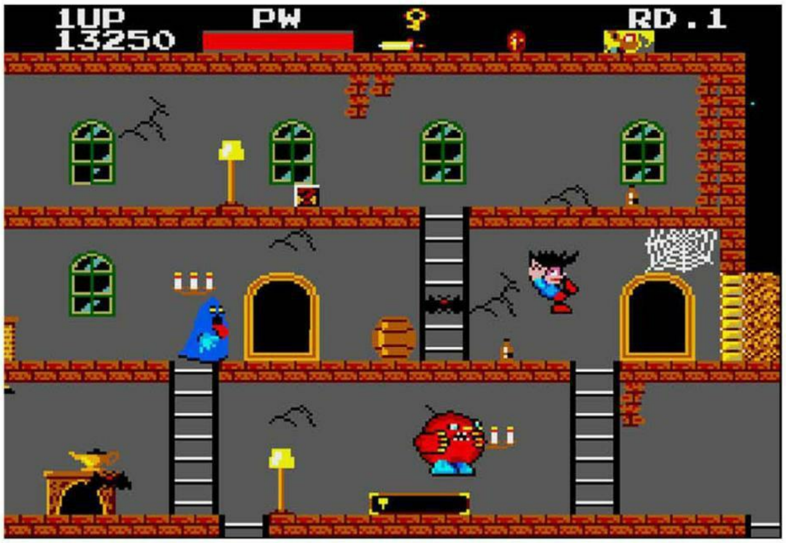
(Side Note: Why would anybody go into a house to unleash Dracula if he is safely locked away? I could understand it if they were causing havoc and killing the town folk, but given that you have to find a key to open what is essentially their prison cell just to be able to fight them doesn't it stand to reason that someone has already dealt with the Dracula problem?)

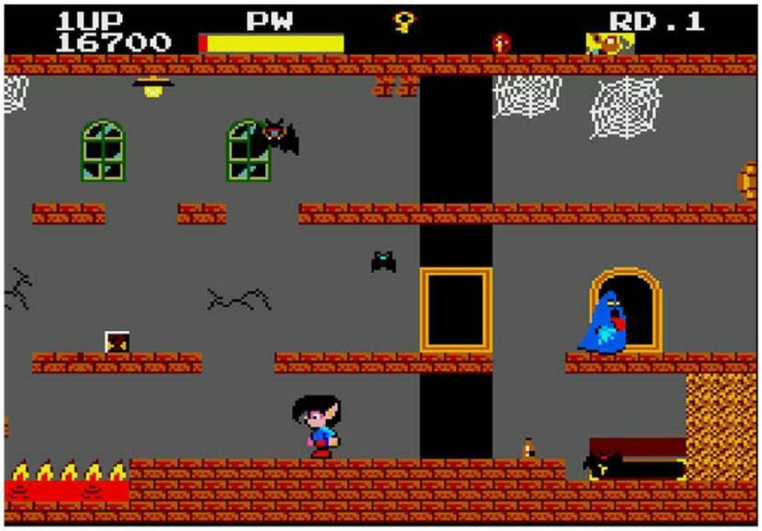


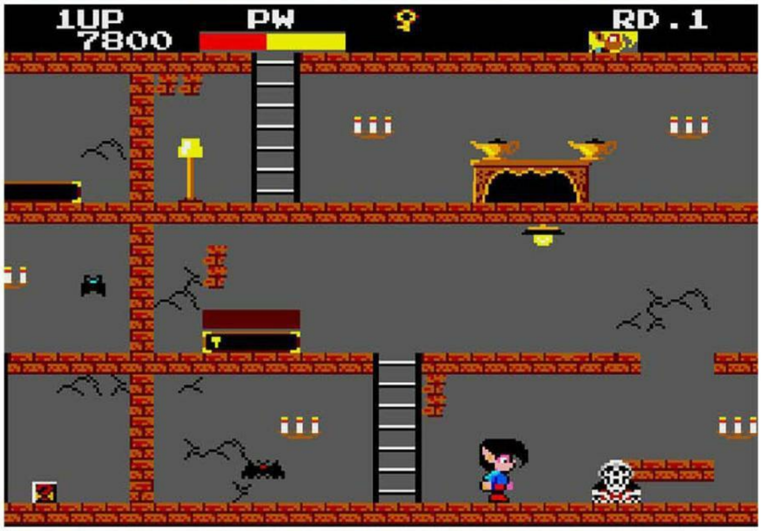


Normally when one sets out to take on the living dead they arm themselves with everything from stakes to whips to shotguns. Not our hero Mick however, he is quite content going into battle with just his fists. It is possible to pick up a knife while exploring the house, however in order to do so you must find the trigger for it. Walking over the switch sends a knife flying at your head, which must be jumped on in order to retrieve. To add another level of frustration to weapon procurement, the knife only lasts a short time, so before you know it you will have to repeat the death defying trick.

The enemies range from the simple (bats) to old standards (mummies) to the confusing (fire breathing tomatoes, purple ghosts that are sticking their tongues out at you, etc). Any of these enemies can drop a key, and if you are unarmed expect to pummel some of them a great deal before they drop. The other main enemy is Dracula, which is hands down one of the most infuriating enemies of the 8-Bit era. Dracula starts out as a bat that flies all over the screen and has a bad habit of dive bombing you from a position that gives you no chance to fight back. It gets worse once he changes into "human" form, as he throws haymakers like Mike Tyson that will knock you back on your heels (and sometimes off a hole in the floor which means you get to start the fight over again once you climb back up to the previous screen). And god help you if Dracula gets you cornered as he will beat you literally half to death before flying off. The one saving grace of this fight is that he doesn't take too many hits to kill (three with a knife, five with your fists). Plus how often do you get to punch Dracula to death?







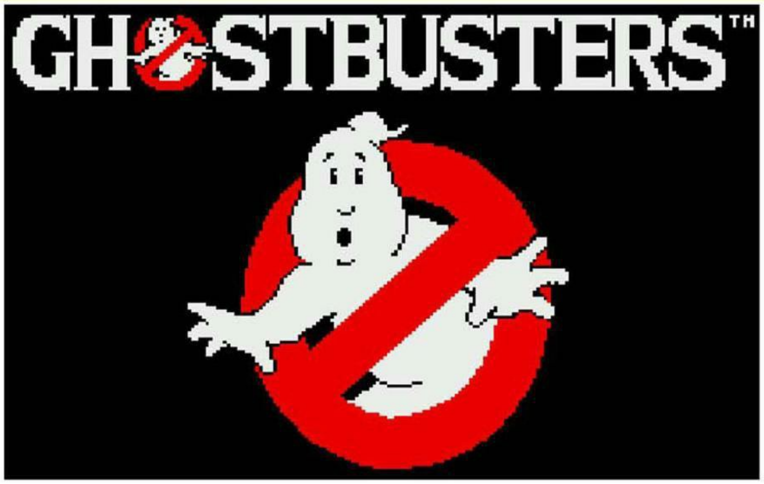
Aside from the fight with Dracula being incredibly cheap, there really aren't too many other issues that hold the game back. The biggest point that is worth mentioning is the fact that the house should have been condemned years ago since there are invisible holes in the floor that will send you plummeting. There is no indication that you will fall, so you are forced to memorize where these pitfalls are.

If you are looking for a prime example of an early 8-bit platformer Ghost House isn't a terrible way to go. Just don't expect anything deep or engaging.

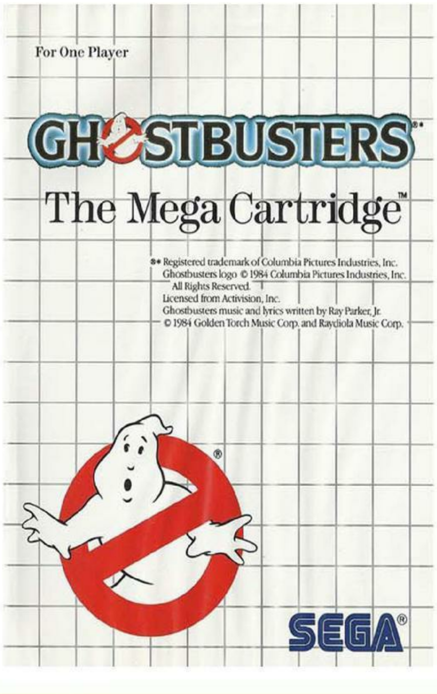
GHOSTBUSTERS

Release Date: 1987
Developer: Activision
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1


GHOSTBUSTERS™

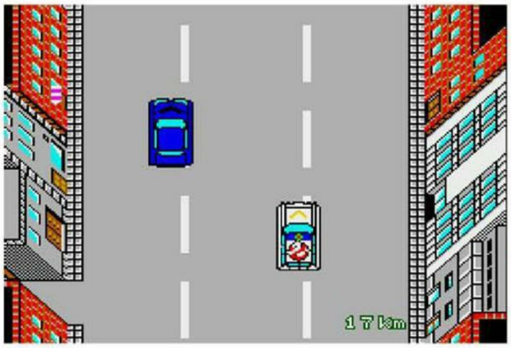
Ghostbusters lives up to the "licensed games" stereotype as it is one of the most convoluted, poorly put together games ever to hit the Master System.

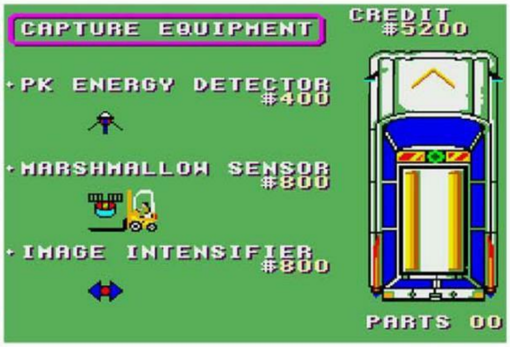

For One Player
GHOSTBUSTERS®
The Mega Cartridge™
®• Registered trademark of Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc.
Ghostbusters logo © 1984 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc.
All Rights Reserved.
Licensed from Activision, Inc.
Ghostbusters music and lyrics written by Ray Parker, Jr.
© 1984 Golden Torch Music Corp. and Raydiola Music Corp.
SEGA®

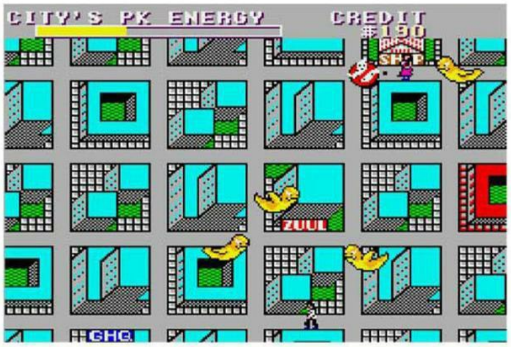
The story more or less follows the story of the original film. You are in control of the Ghostbusters who must capture ghosts and prevent the city from being taken over by Zuul. At least that's the gist of it since once you hit start there is very little if any indication as to what is going on. If you've never seen the movie, first off shame on you because it's a classic, and second you aren't going to have a clue as to what's happening.

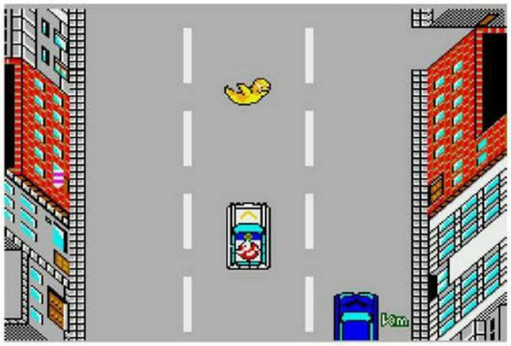
At the very start of the game you are given a ten thousand dollar loan and are immediately approached by a used car salesman. You have your choice between four cars that have different speeds and item capacity. The speed difference doesn't really matter as the driving segments are short and utterly pointless, but the ability to hold extra items is nice since you will need to visit the store and buy extra traps and more powerful beams.

(Side Note: Is it just me or is it kind of a scary thought to realize that there is a shop that is selling nuclear powered particle beams to anyone off the street? Putting aside the fact that they are incredibly destructive and could easily vaporize a human being, if you remember the warnings that Egon gave in the movie, they have the potential to essentially destroy all life in the known universe. One would think those kinds of items would be regulated.)



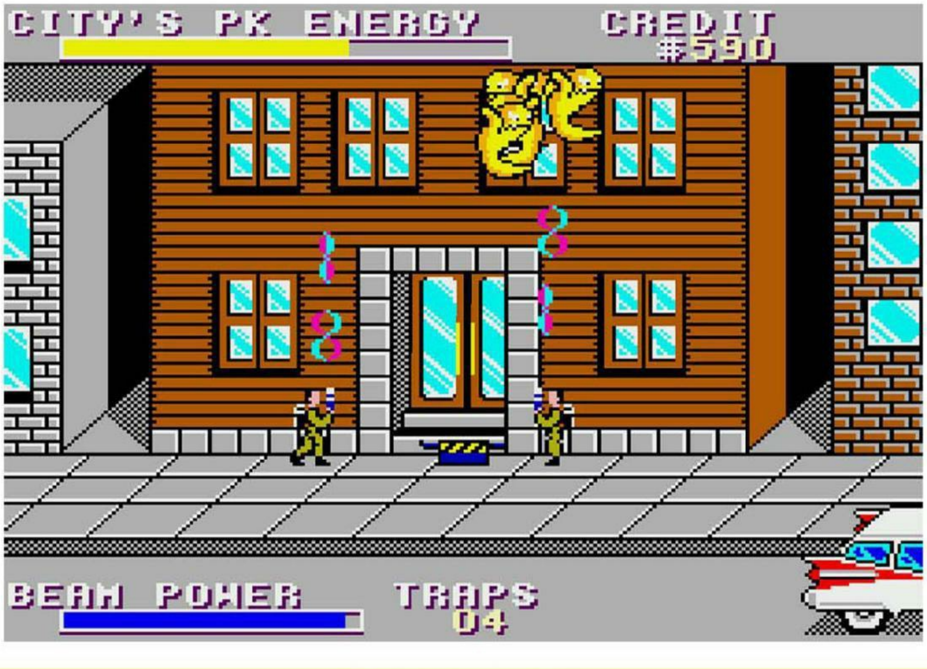

CAPTURE EQUIPMENT
CREDIT $5200
PK ENERGY DETECTOR $400
MARSHMALLOW SENSOR $800
IMAGE INTENSIFIER $800
PARTS 00


CITY'S PK ENERGY
CREDIT $190
SHOP
ZUUL
GHQ



For the next five to seven minutes you are set loose upon the city to capture as many ghosts as you can. On the map of the city some of the buildings will being to flash red, which indicates that they are under ghost attack. Instead of just driving over there you have to first plot your course using the ghostbusters symbol, which is a bit of a pain since it can be difficult to line up your turns properly. This causes you to move back and forth trying to get the symbol to go where you want it to, which not only raises the probability of your controller hitting the wall, but also adds to how far you must drive. Once you finally have your course set it's time to drive, which instead of being a hectic race across town is more of a leisurely Sunday drive since you will rarely pass more than two cars in a given trip.

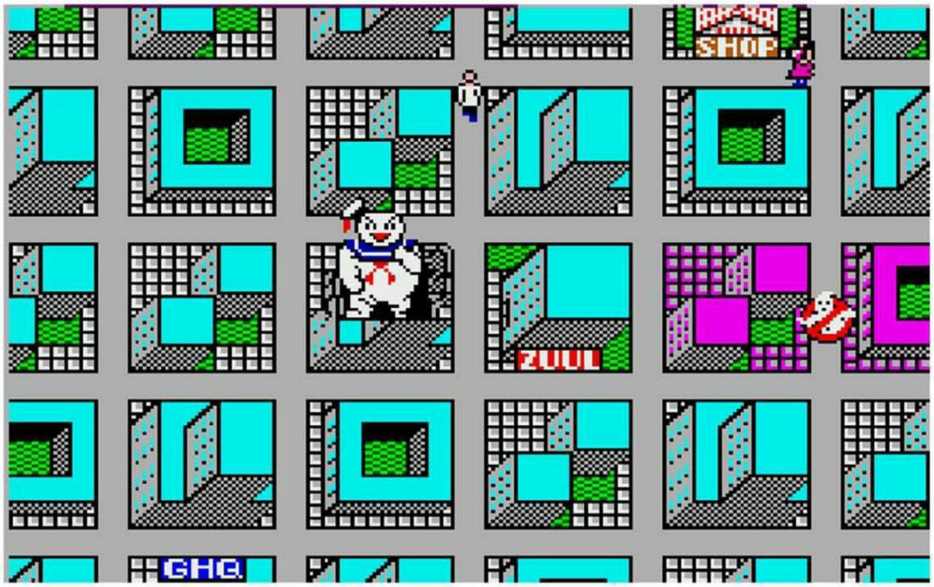
Now for the fun part, capturing ghosts. Well, at least this is where the fun should be. You are put in control of two ghostbusters who drop a trap in the middle of the sidewalk outside a random building. You get to hit a button to start your beams then take turns moving your two ghostbusters into position to corral the ghosts that are floating above you. Once they are over the trap you trip it, capture the ghosts and move on. And yes, it's just as fun as that incredibly dry description makes it sound. The only thing that breaks up this monotony is the occasional appearance of everyones favorite ghost, Slimer. It doesn't really change the gameplay, but it is nice to see him have a cameo.



As you are going from job to job there is a PK energy meter in the top left of the screen that slowly fills up. When it fills for the third time it will trigger the final battle at the Zuul building. Well, it will trigger it provided you have earned enough money from fighting ghosts (as best I can tell that number is ten thousand dollars). Now I don't remember there being a credit check in the original film, but I suppose there could be a deleted scene out there.

Once the final battle begins you have to take on the Staypuft Marshmallow Man. Well, not so much take on as run by his hyperactive jumping midget version who for some reason is guarding the door to the building. If you aren't able to get the majority of your guys past him it's an immediate game over. If you are lucky enough to sneak by him you get to climb up stairs before facing off against Gozer in a short battle. And that's the entire final battle, and the end of the game. If you can beat it on your first attempt, you can literally see everything the game has to offer in under ten minutes.

To put it mildly, this game is a disappointment. If you are a diehard Ghostbusters fan you should skip this version and track down the much more entertaining Genesis version



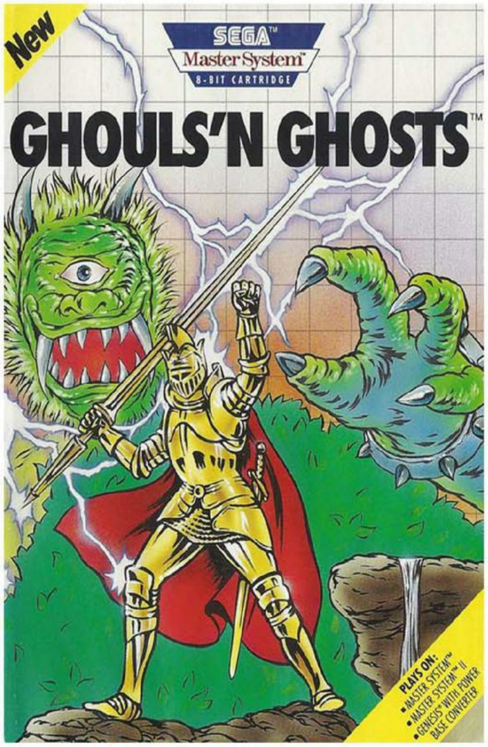
GHOULS'N GHOSTS

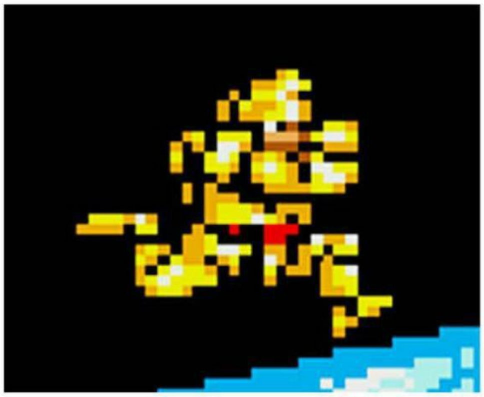
Release Date: 1990
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1-2

GHOULS'N GHOSTS

This is a really nice port of the popular Capcom arcade game and still ranks among the most difficult games to ever exist.

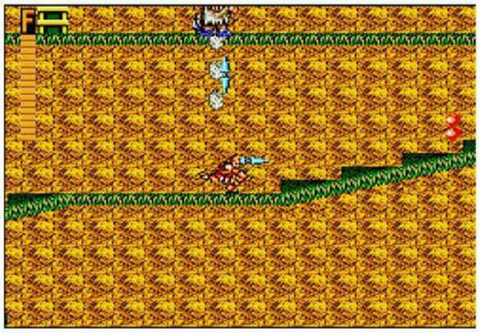

New
SEGA
Master System
8-BIT CARTRIDGE
GHOULS'N GHOSTS
PLAYS ON:
MASTER SYSTEM
MASTER SYSTEM II
GENESIS WITH POWER BASE CONVERTER

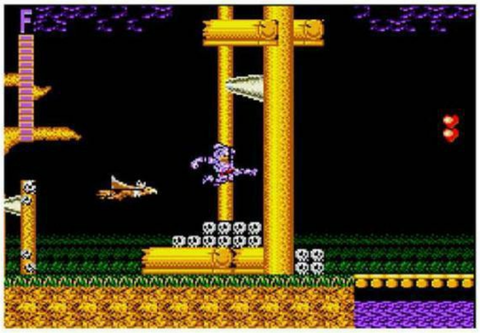


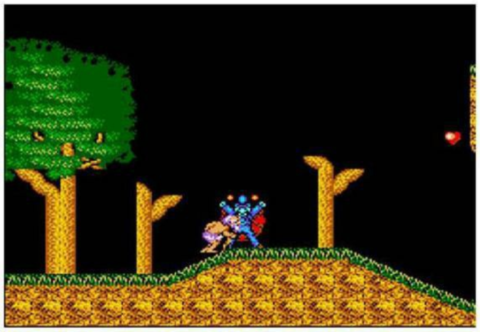
GHOULS'N GHOSTS

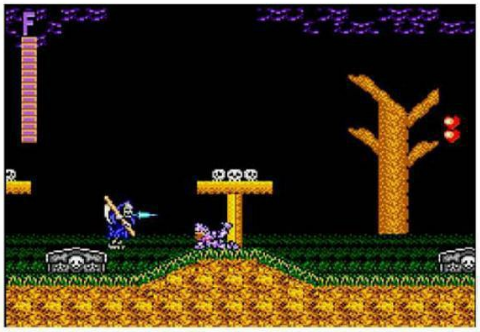
Like all the other games in the series, you are in control of the knight Arthur who is on a quest to destroy all the evil in the land. At the start Arthur is slow and incredibly weak, armed with a never ending supply of javelins and dressed in the basic silver "armor". I put armor in quotes because it can withstand but a single blow before it explodes off of Arthur, leaving him in nothing but his boxers to continue the good fight. Of course Arthur isn't built much better than his armor, as one additional hit turns him into a pile of bones. Expect this to happen a ton as there are dozens upon dozens of fast moving things that are bent on killing you.

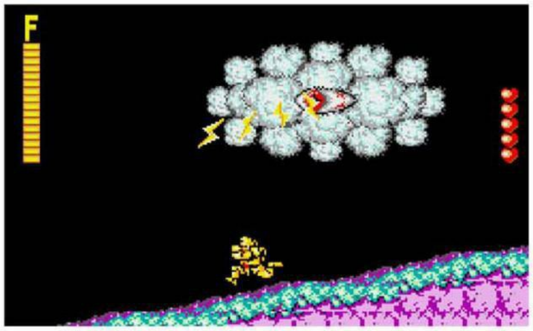
Zombies, vultures, flying tornado creatures, fire breathing plants, guillotines, giant guillotines, and vomiting troll creatures. And that's just the first level. Most, if not all, of the enemies move faster than you, which as you can imagine makes killing them kind of difficult. If you somehow survive the onslaught of these creatures and make it to the end of the level it's time to face off with a giant boss. These bosses can be anything from a giant demon knight with a floating fire breathing head, to a cloud that rains lightening bolts down upon you, to a fire demon that will make your life miserable. If you are able to defeat them you get a key that open the giant door they were guarding, granting you access to the next level.

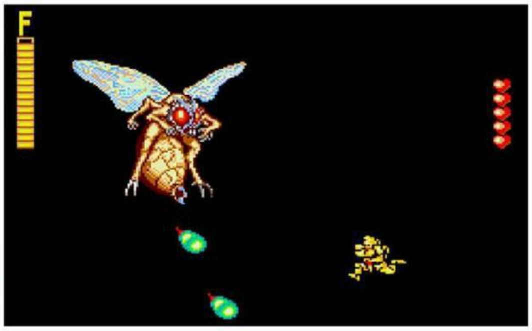




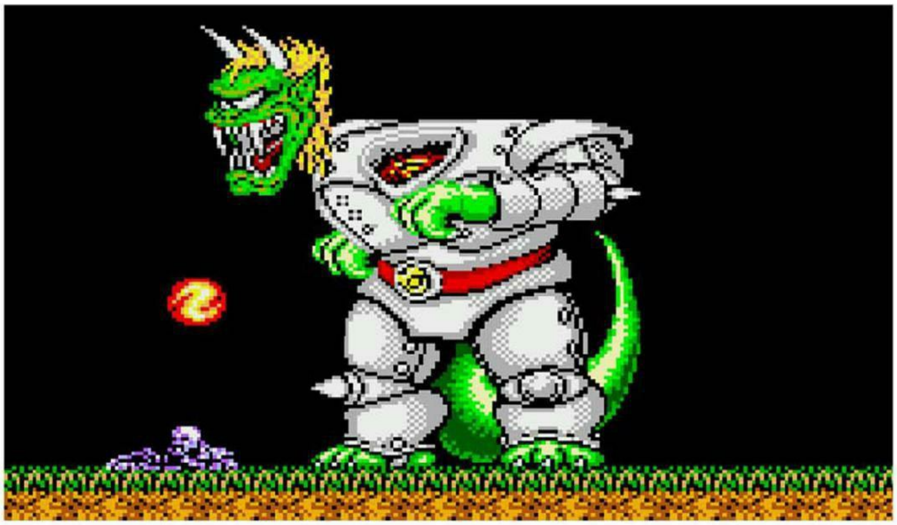






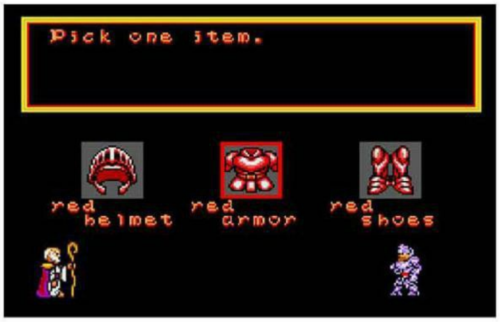


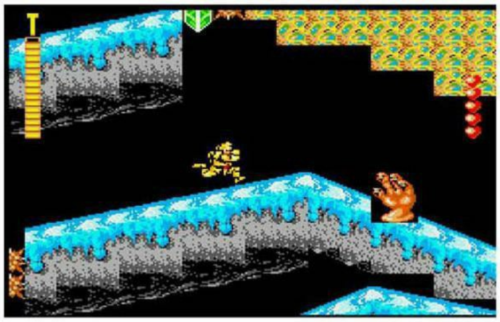
All hope is not lost however, as Arthur does have a variety of things up his sleeve to help him overcome the odds against him. Sprinkled throughout each level are treasure chests that can be opened by throwing a couple shots into them. On occasion these chests will reveal a magical doorway that takes Arthur to an ally that powers him up. Sometimes Arthur can replenish his health or magic, grab a new weapon like an axe or fireball, or power up his armor. There are several levels of armor that give Arthur more protection from enemies (for example the red armor let's Arthur be hit twice before being dressed down to his boxers). The ultimate goal however is to find enough of these doors to finally power Arthur up to the gold armor, which will finally allow him to start using magic (and to be able to defeat the final boss, who if you aren't powered completely up for results in you being sent back to the beginning to try again). Just be warned, a lot of times there is an evil magician hiding in the treasure chests who can turn you into a duck or an elderly person, making surviving a bit more difficult to do.

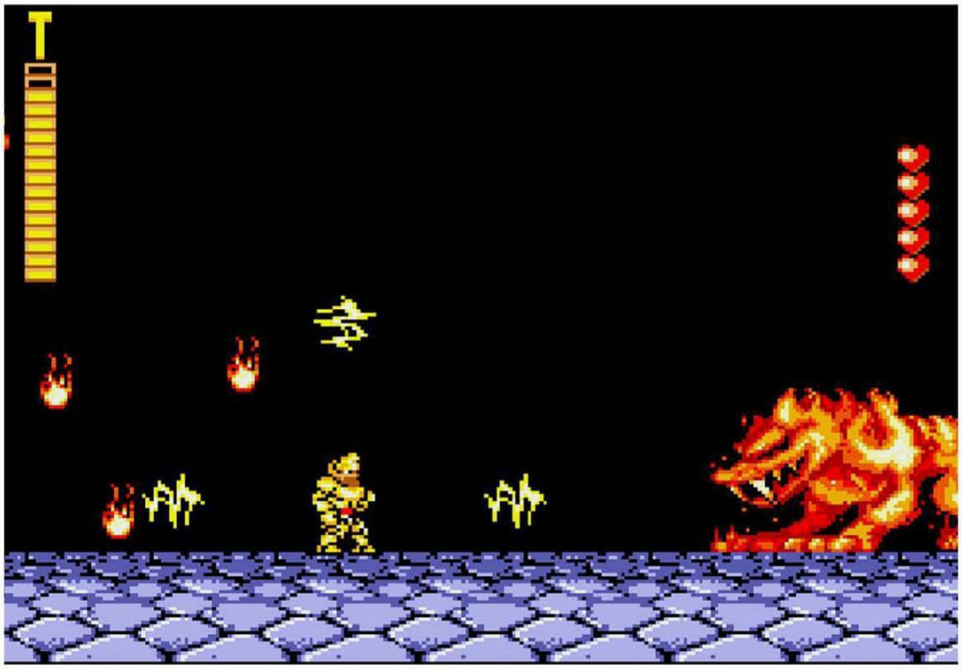


There are several different kinds of magics. You start out with Fire and Thunder, which sends elemental projectiles in various directions. You can also get a shield to protect you from attacks, while the Double magic makes a clone of yourself who can throw a weapon for double the power. The most devastating magic is bomb, which when activated causes Arthur to detonate an atomic bomb around him, which does major damage to everything in sight.

If you are a fan of the series you will be pleased as this is a quality port.







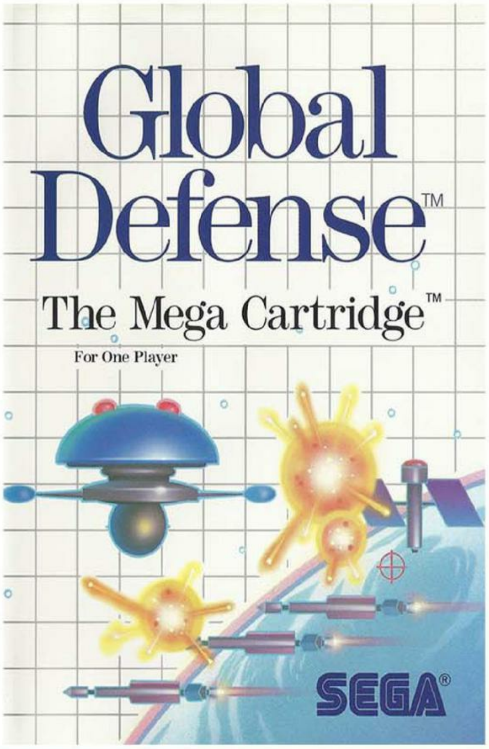
GLOBAL DEFENSE

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

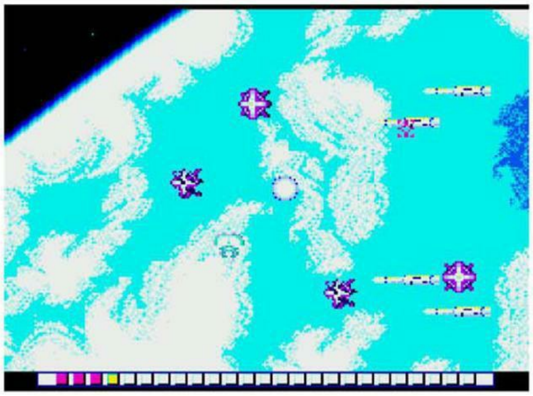
Genre: Action - Flying
Players: 1

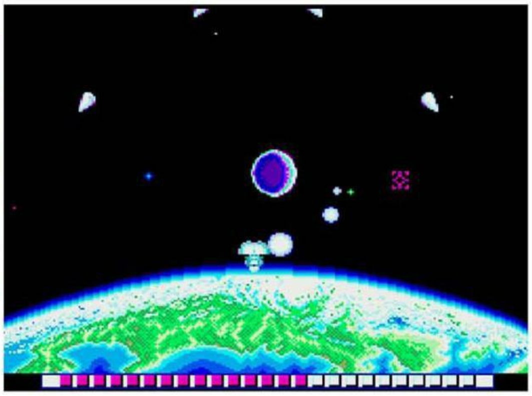
GLOBAL
DEFENSE

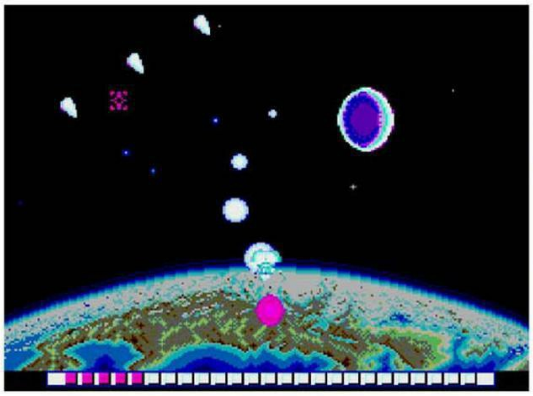
This is a port of the somewhat obscure arcade game. Remembered primarily for it's disturbing opening animation of the World Trade Center being nuked, Global Defense is actually a quality flying action game.

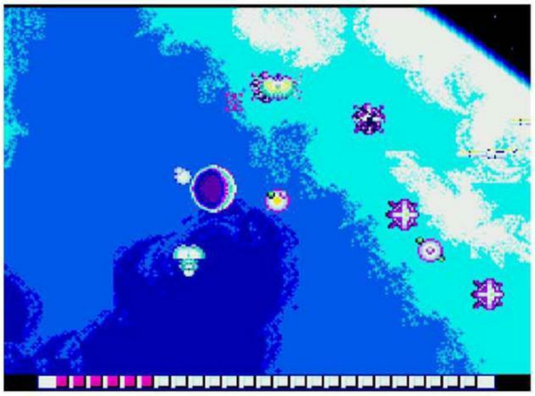

Global
Defense™
The Mega Cartridge™
For One Player
SEGA®

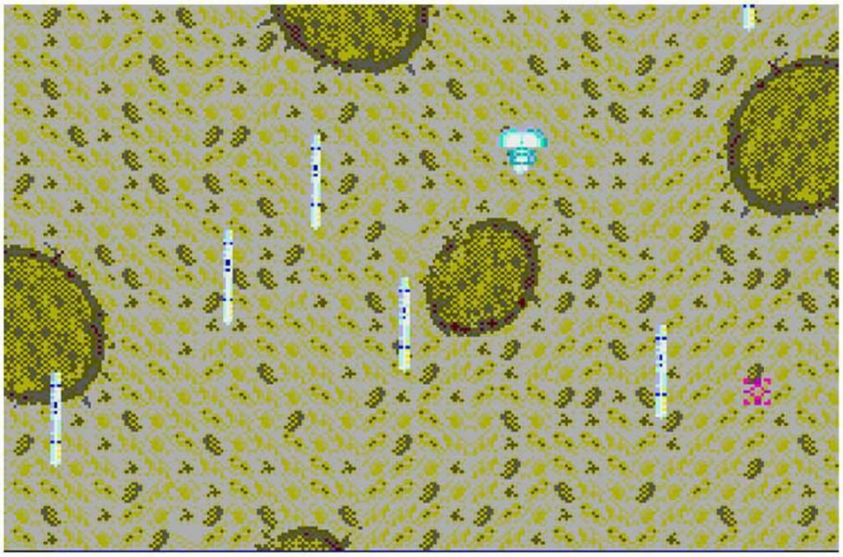
The gameplay is essentially Missile Command 2.0. You are in control of a satellite that is tasked with defending the earth from an alien missile onslaught. The levels are broken up into two different sections, offensive and defensive. The offensive segment has you flying through the enemy's armada trying to weaken them as much as possible. You have an unlimited supply of exploding bullets, so you are free to unload on all of the enemy ships, missiles, and bases that you come across. For the most part the missiles and bombs will slowly move across the screen, while the bases will take a few potshots at you that are easy enough to avoid. Every now and then however there will be an enemy that will hunt you down and try and destroy you, but they are few and far between. The defensive segment of the game has you positioned above the earth as missiles crest the horizon and rain down upon the citizens below. For this segment you can pretty much stay centered near the bottom of the screen and fill the sky with your exploding bullets. If you survive the onslaught you are off to the next planet to defend it.



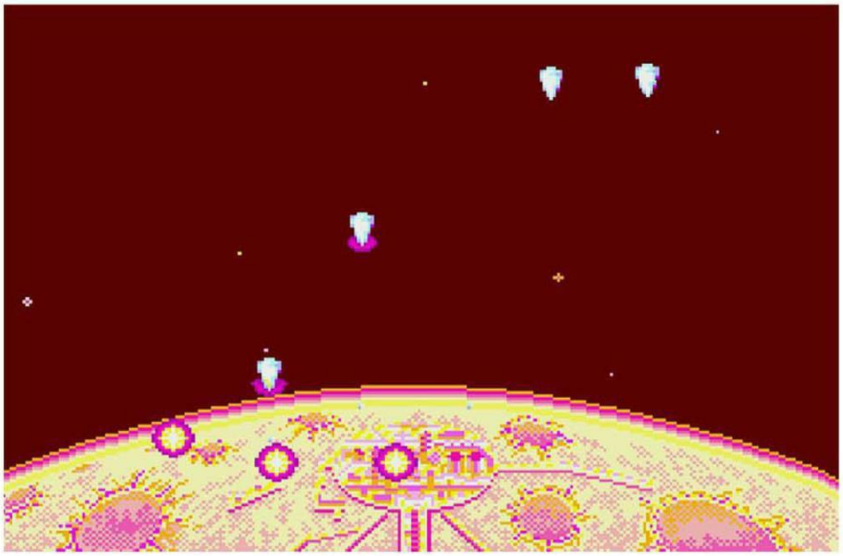


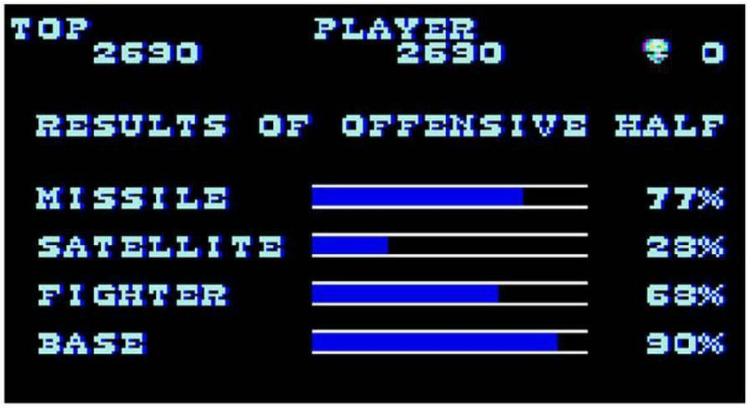






The controls take a bit to get used to. The D-pad defaults to moving the crosshairs that aim your bullets, so in order to move your satellite out of harms way you have to hold down a button. This is an awkward control scheme that feels backwards from the way it should be. Thankfully though all you have to do is hold down the fire button to unleash a never ending rapid fire stream of projectiles at the enemy, so even if you are taking evasive action you will still be filling the skies with death and destruction.





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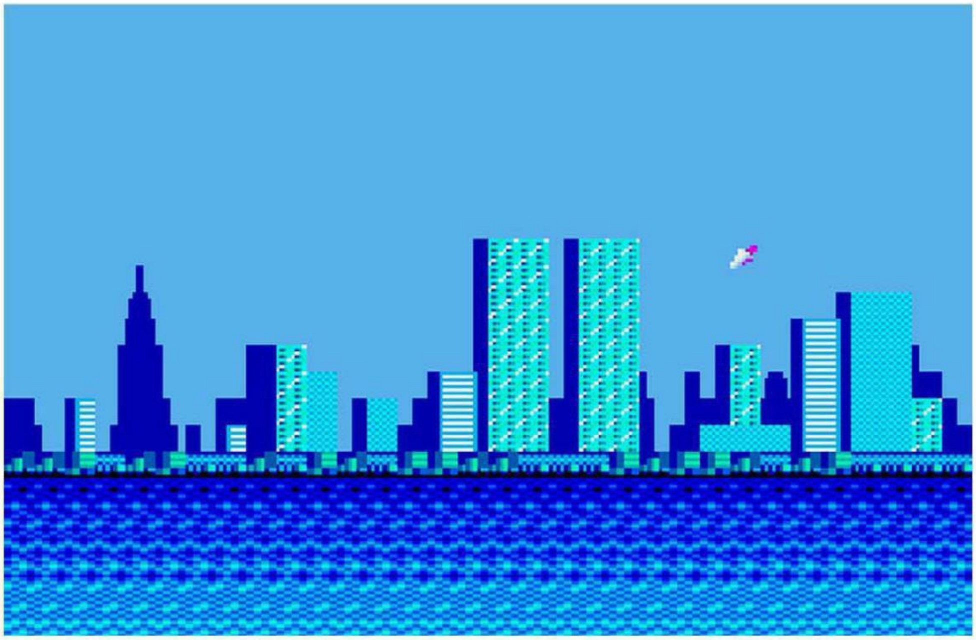
TOP          PLAYER
  2690         2690        0

RESULTS OF OFFENSIVE HALF

MISSILE                    77%
SATELLITE                  28%
FIGHTER                    68%
BASE                       90%
```

The game can end one of two ways. During the offensive portion if you explode if you take a direct hit. Three of those and it's lights out. During the offensive portion every missile you let by you fills up the meter at the bottom of the screen, which is important for the defensive segment. The meter tracks the damage to the planet, and when filled the planet will explode in the defensive section with the next missile impact. Thankfully the planet can withstand a ton of damage, and it resets at the end of each offensive/defensive set.

Global Defense is a quality flying action game, and should be played by anyone who was a fan of Missile Command.

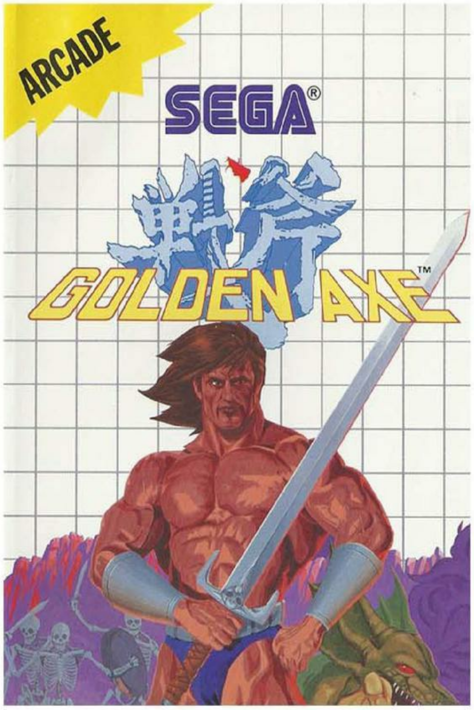


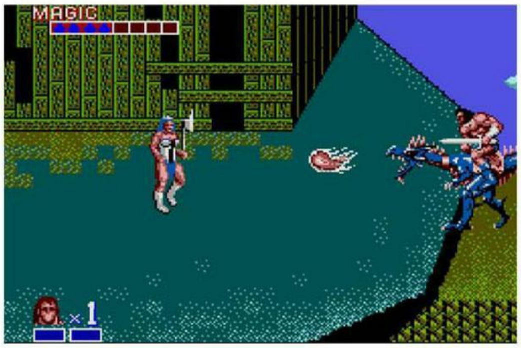
GOLDEN AXE

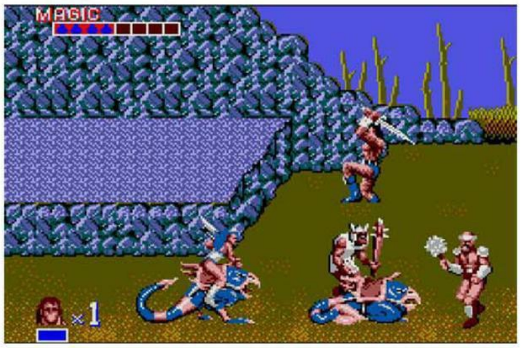
Release Date: 1989
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action Beat 'Em Up
Players: 1

Golden Axe is a passable port of the arcade and Genesis game, even though there are some very noticeable absences and flaws.

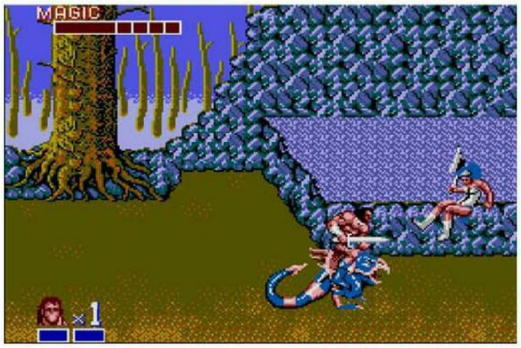

ARCADE
SEGA
戦斧
GOLDEN AXE

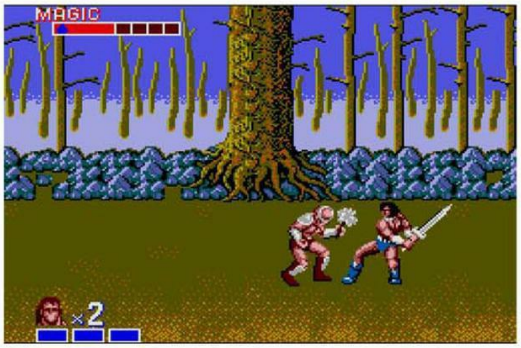




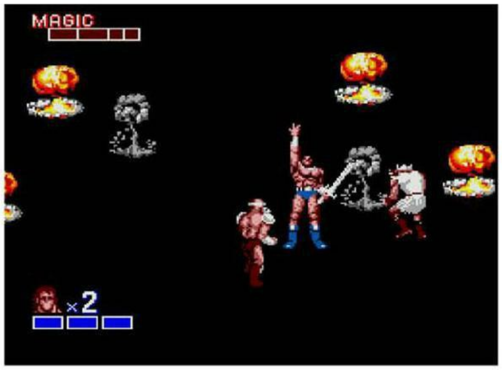
The story is pretty simple. The evil Death Adder must be defeated so that the kingdom can return to its peaceful existence. In order to accomplish this you must travel across the kingdom while killing lots and lots and lots of bad guys. These range from the standard barbarians to the women beast riders to heavily armed skeletons to a pair of sledgehammer wielding giants. The enemies are downright brutal in this game, and even the standard barbarians can decimate you in a hurry. Aside from the fact they hit like a ton of brick, when there are two of them onscreen together, one of them immediately flanks you. Needless to say this brings a world of hurt down upon you since you lack the quickness to attack enemies from both front and behind.

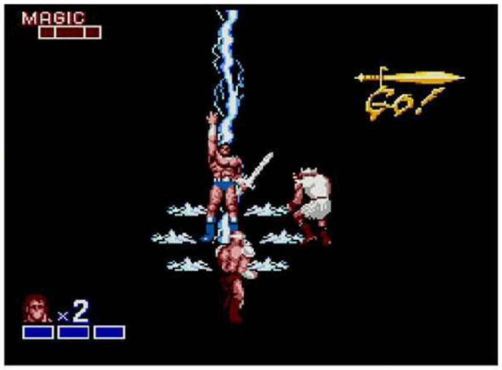
There are a few things which can level the playing field however. In addition to your magic (more on that shortly) you can also take control of vicious beasts, provided of course you can knock the rider off of it. The first one is a short bird creature with a hard hitting tail whip. The other two are dragons, one of which spits a fireball clear across the screen, while the other one breaths fire directly in front of it. All three of these creatures can help you thin out a crowd of enemies.

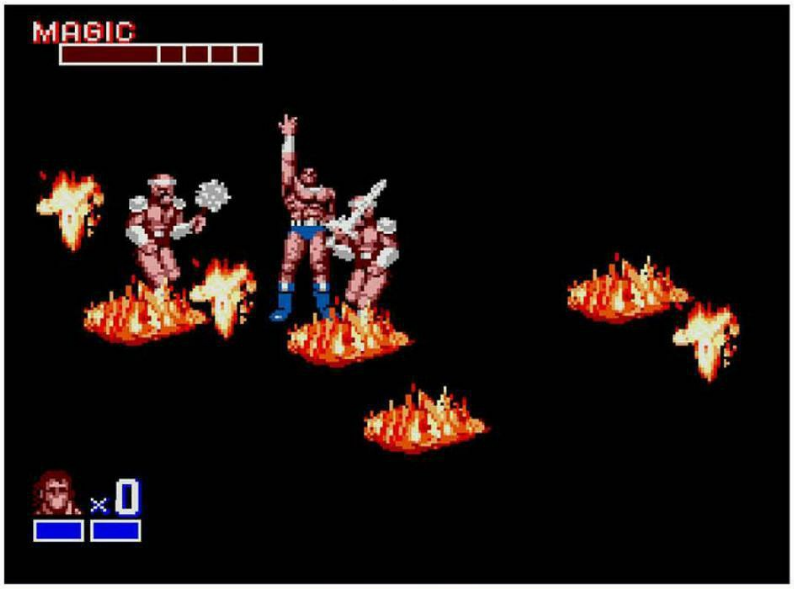




In the arcade and Genesis versions of the game you have your choice between a Warrior, an Amazon, or a Dwarf, however given the hardware limitations of the Master System your only option here is the Warrior called Ax Battler (who oddly enough uses a sword, go figure). In the other versions each of the characters has a distinctive magic at their disposal (fire, earth, lightening), all of which have different power maximums. Thankfully here they have given you the option of what magical power you want, which is a nice touch. The fire magic is the most powerful and unleashes a firestorm upon your foes, while the lightening magic is the least powered. The earth magic is the mid-range (and the standard for the Warrior) and causes the earth to strike down those who oppose you (which for some reason at the lowest level looks like the earth is being bombarded with tiny atom bombs).

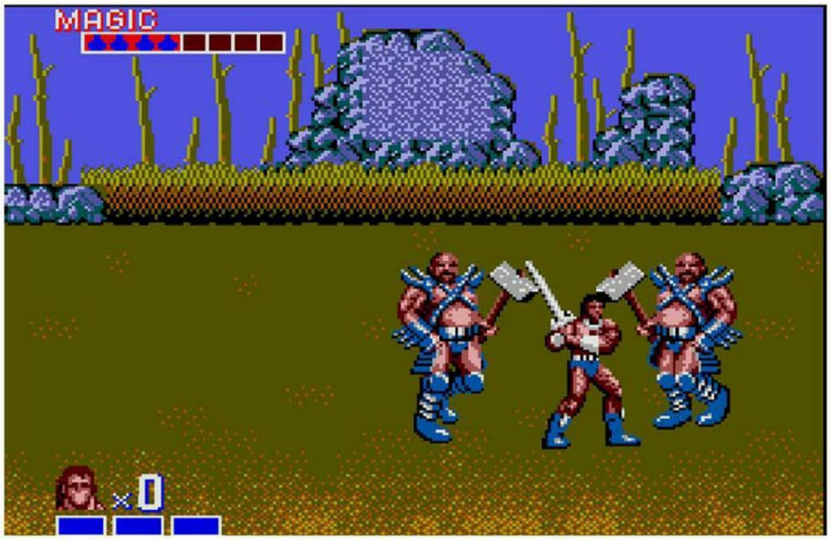


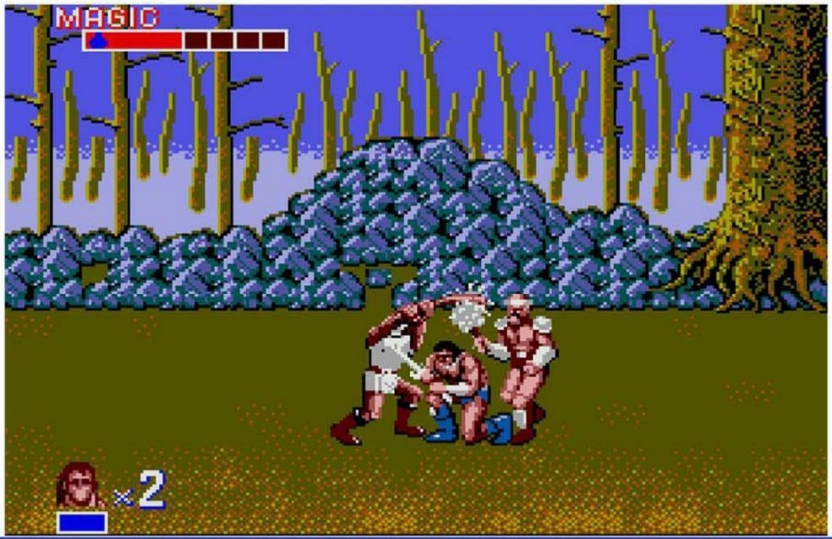




Besides the notable omission of the other two heroes (and thus two player support) there are some other issues with the game. The frame rate is a bit choppy, which at times can make it difficult to line up the finesse hits on targets like the tiny elves who carry magic bottles. The difficulty is incredibly high, and made tougher thanks to the fact that there is only a single continue (there are codes that allow you more, but unless you have the internet you'd never know).

Those problems notwithstanding, Golden Axe is very playable on the Master System. It is certainly nowhere near as good as near arcade quality Genesis version, but worth a look if you are a fan of the series.





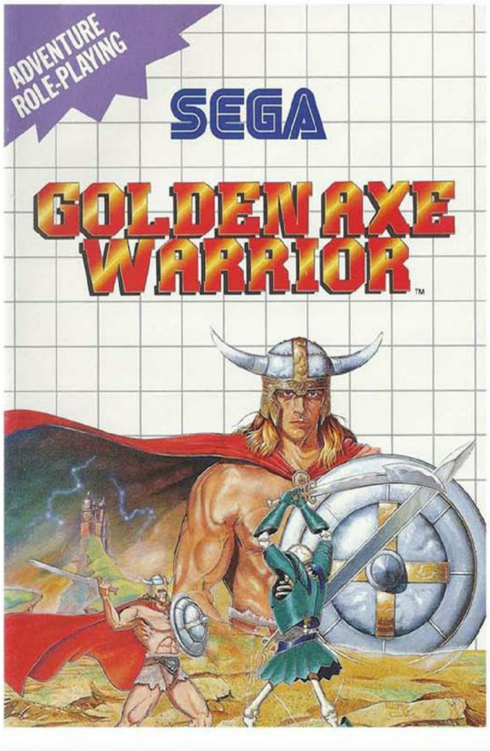
GOLDEN AXE WARRIOR

Release Date: 1991
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - RPG
Players: 1

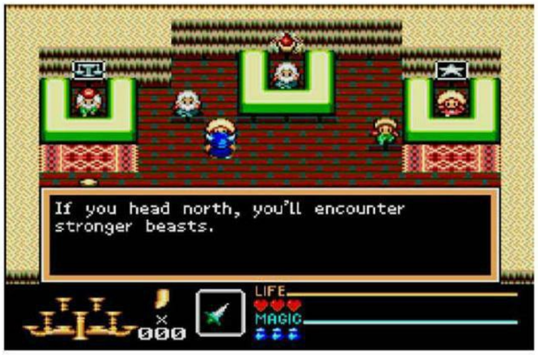
GOLDEN AXE
WARRIOR

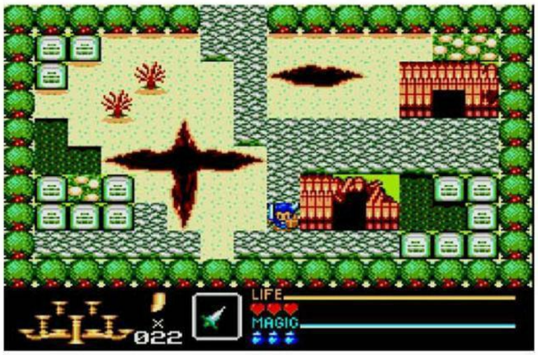
Golden Axe Warrior is one of the killer apps for the Master System, and still holds up quite well today.

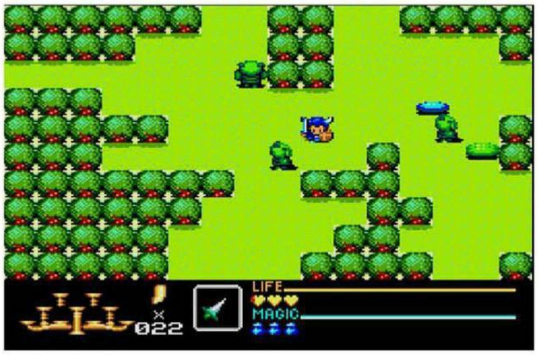

ADVENTURE
ROLE-PLAYING
SEGA
GOLDEN AXE
WARRIOR
™

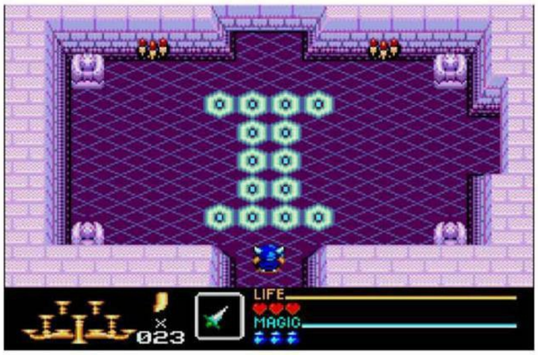
The story is one that has been told a thousand times in video games. You are in control of a lone hero who is sent out on a massive quest to retrieve several pieces of an ancient artifact that will bring peace to the world. In this particular case the evil Death Adder has acquired the nine crystals that protect your homeland of Firewood, and it's up to you to find them and defeat everyone and everything that is standing in your path.

Firewood is a giant world, spanning over two hundred screens for you to explore. Each screen is a self contained battle field that has randomly spawning creatures, hidden passageways, doorways, and the occasional puzzle. When you reach the edge of the screen the action pauses and shifts to the neighboring screen, which is a great way to escape danger if you are being overwhelmed. Hidden throughout the land are ten dungeons to be found and explored, which is where you will find the crystals and Death Adder.


If you head north, you'll encounter stronger beasts.

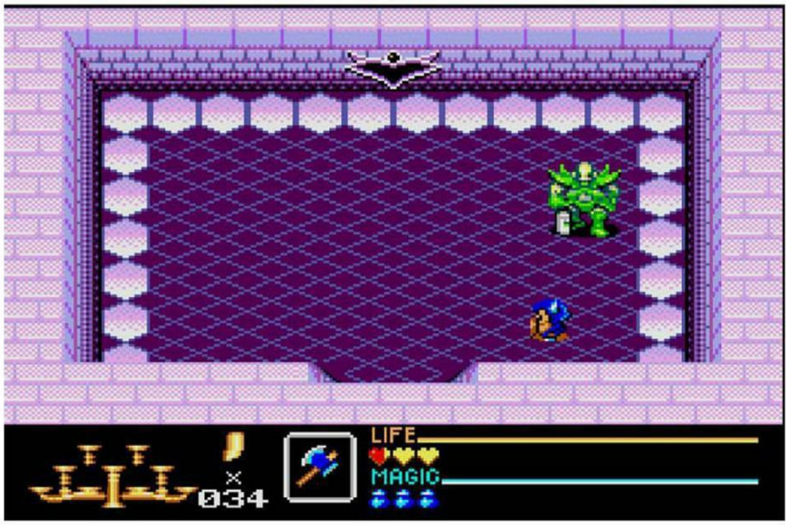






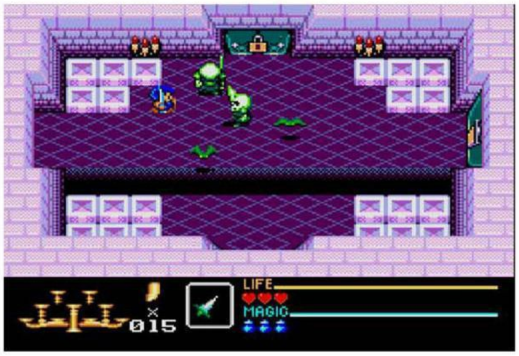
The dungeons play just like the over world, with the exception of there being locked doors. You can save up horns (the in game currency) and buy keys, or you can find them laying around in the dungeons, although sometimes you will have to kill all inhabitants in a room to get the key to appear. It is important to explore every room of the dungeon as there is a special treasure chest that will grant you a vitally important item. These can be items that can make your quest a bit easier like a battle axe will allows you to cut down trees (which not only clears pathways for you, but will also reveal hidden rooms) or a torch which can light up darkened rooms. There are some items that are required in order to progress in the game, like the Magic Rope that is found in the third dungeon. Without it you can't get past a certain area, which means you will be stuck until you acquire it.

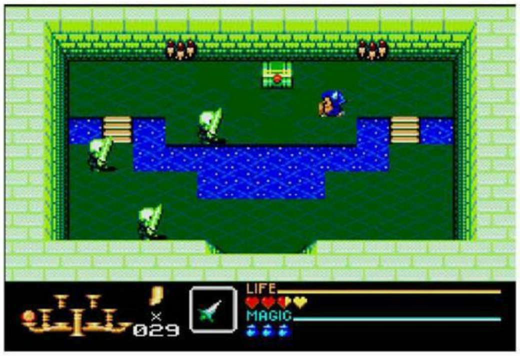
In both the dungeons as well as the over world there will be a wide variety of things for you to kill. These are everything from the generic skeletons and bats to some of the more recognizable Golden Axe characters like the tail whip birds. Some enemies can be killed in a single blow, however the majority of them will require quite a few more hits, at least until you power up your weapon. In addition to the normal enemies you will encounter, at the end of each dungeon you will have to face off against a powerful boss. Some are old standbys like a fire breathing dragon, but other Golden Axe favorites will make appearances like the first level boss being one of the giant hammer brothers. If you are successful in your battle you will gain an additional heart for your health bar, and one of the nine crystals, just don't expect it to be easy because they pack a heck of a punch.

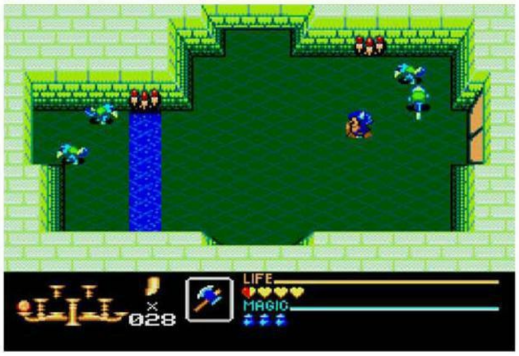


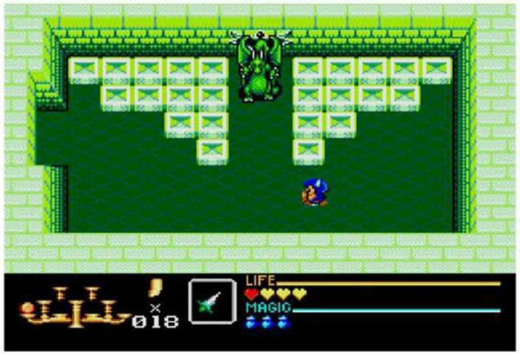
Even though it seems like the odds are against you there are a lot of things that can help you in your quest. Along the way you'll find towns that have items for you to purchase, as well as hints about other secret areas. For example, early on you hear of a dwarf who is hurting and in need to help. If you are able to locate him and the healing item he requires he will give you magic, which is an important addition to your offensive capabilities. There are multiple magics, more powerful swords, armor and shields, and a whole host of other magical items just waiting to be found.

Now it's impossible to talk about Golden Axe Warrior without addressing the elephant in the room, which is that it looks like a direct ripoff of The Legend of Zelda. While some may dismiss it as a blatant theft of the NES classic, a better way to think of it would be that this is the sequel that we should have gotten instead of the abomination that was The Adventure of Link. Regardless of whether you think it's a ripoff or pseudo sequel, if you are a fan of the genre you need to check it out as it's one of the best 8-Bit games around.









GOLVELLIUS

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Compile
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - RPG
Players: 1

Golvellius

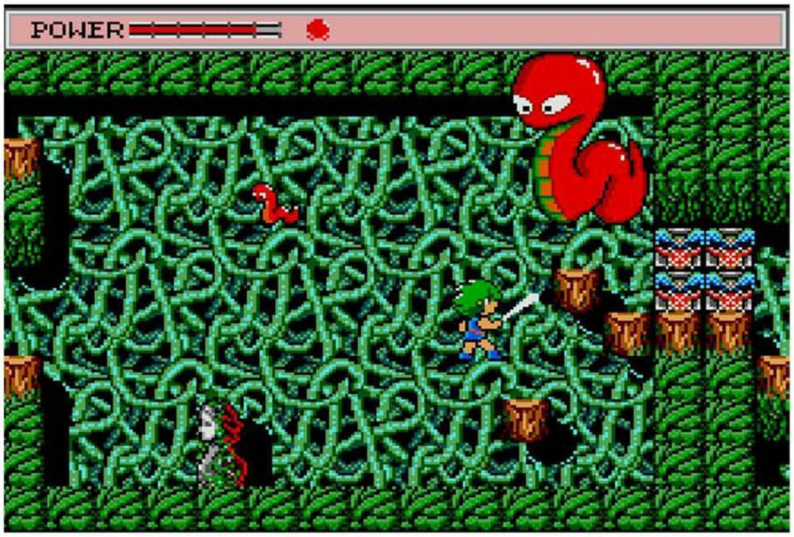
Golvellius is a fairly deep action-RPG that combines a lot of different elements into a satisfying adventure.

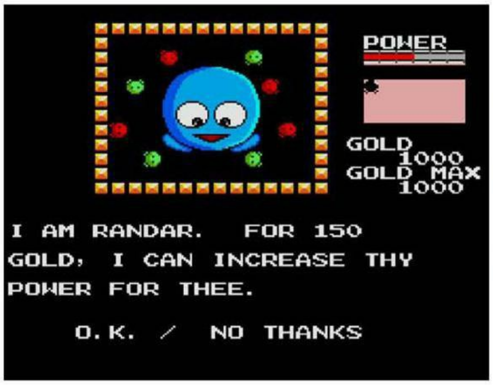
ACTION
With Password Save!
SEGA
Golvellius
Valley of Doom

The story is straightforward in that you must rescue the princess and save the kingdom from the evil that has invaded. The only way to do this is to kill the bad guys and find the seven crystals that are scattered across the land, which as it usually goes in these games, is easier said than done. There are three types of levels found here, side scrolling, top down scrolling, and a top down over world that is broken into multiple enemy filled screens.

The game starts out with a side scrolling level, which is without a doubt the weakest of the three. The hero can run fast and jump high, but for some reason can't turn around. Nothing here is particularly challenging, just a simple walk from point A to point B while killing a few lesser creatures like bats and snakes. At the end of the level is a mini-boss, which is a giant leaping snake that throws out smaller snakes. A few quick strikes is all it takes to do it in and move on. After the first time whenever you encounter a side scrolling stage the mini-boss fight will be followed by a more robust boss fight.

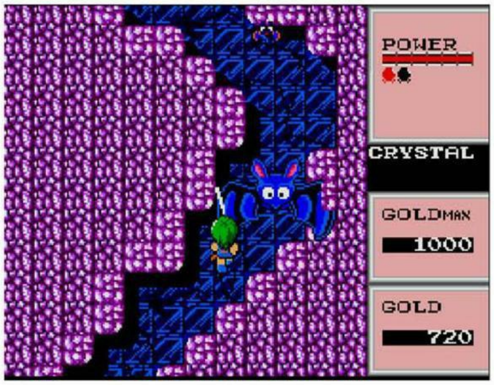
There are issues with the side scrolling levels, and it mostly has to do with the fact that the jumping portions can be frustratingly difficult. Your character runs and jumps like they are on ice, so trying to make precision jumps can be challenging. To make this worse, there will occasionally be enemies standing in your way that must be dealt with so you have a spot to land. Also, the enemies apparently pack a heck of a punch as if you get hit you will be sent flying back halfway across the screen. Thankfully there aren't a ton of enemies to deal with, so it's not a persistent problem.





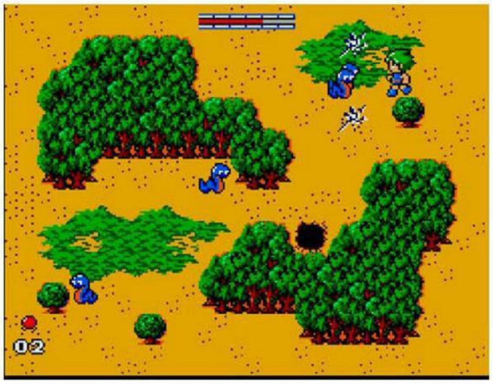
I AM RANDAR. FOR 150 GOLD, I CAN INCREASE THY POWER FOR THEE.

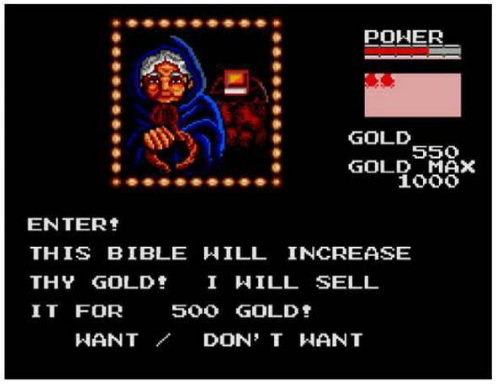
O.K. / NO THANKS



The top down scrolling levels are much better. It's a forced scrolling level where you have to weave in and out of a maze while fighting against constantly spawning enemies. If you get stuck behind an obstacle and are forced off screen you will be sent back to the beginning of the level, which adds an extra bit of challenge. Like its side scrolling counterpart, at the end you have to face off with a mini-boss before you can take on the real boss.

The over world level is where you will be spending the majority of your time. When your character hits the edge of the screen everything will shift to reveal another screen (similar to the way the Legend of Zelda does). Each screen will have a ton of spawning enemies which can range from snakes to bats to burrowing creatures. On virtually every screen there will be a hole for you to descend in order to purchase items or receive clues. These holes are sometimes hidden and will only be revealed once you have slaughtered enough enemies, or in the case of some of the boss holding dungeons, a specific task must be done (such as striking a certain rock to reveal the hiding spot).





ENTER!
THIS BIBLE WILL INCREASE THY GOLD! I WILL SELL IT FOR 500 GOLD!

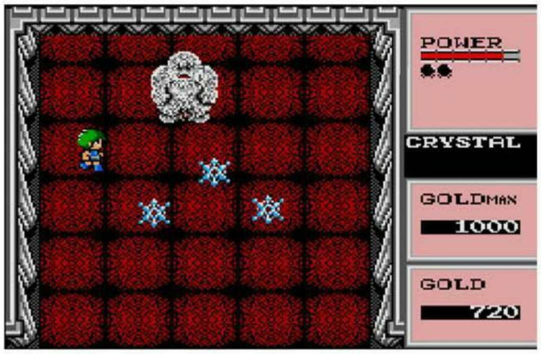
WANT / DON'T WANT

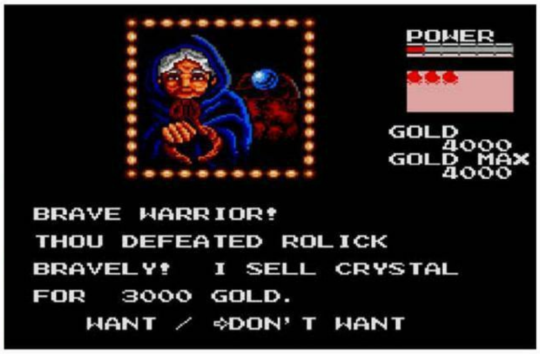
There are a ton of items that can be bought to help you in your journey. More powerful shields, additional health units, herbs that stave off death, and of course bibles. When you start out you have a maximum amount of gold that you can carry, and by purchasing bibles you can increase that number. This is a mandatory part of the game as for some reason when you defeat the boss you don't get a crystal, rather some crazy old lady will agree to sell it to you for an inflated cost. While it is good to see that even in the face of subjugation at the hands of the evil that has infested the land, capitalism is alive and well, even when it comes to the one item that can set them free.

Unlike a lot of games in this genre, when you kill enemies they don't drop anything outside the occasional health boost. Instead you get a set amount of gold for each enemy you kill, which is much nicer than having to continually slaughter entire species in the hopes that they'll drop a few measly coins. Of course given that just about everything costs money in this game you will still be committing genocide, but at least you know you'll be gaining money with each kill rather than many of them dying in vain.

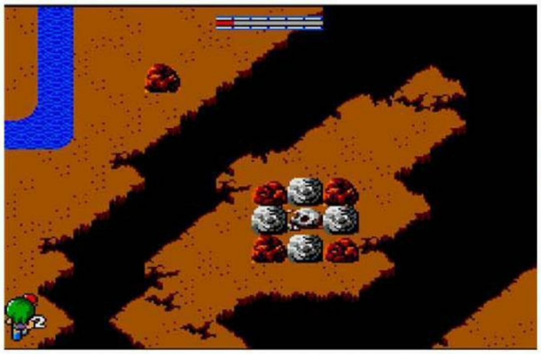
The over world enemies are more than plentiful and will cause you tons of pain. For starters they will continually spawn on a screen no matter how many of them you kill. This is quite a pain when you are searching for a hidden hole, but it makes life so much easier when you are trying to gain gold. If you can find yourself a bottleneck you can sit there and swing your sword as fast as you can and the enemies will come to you.

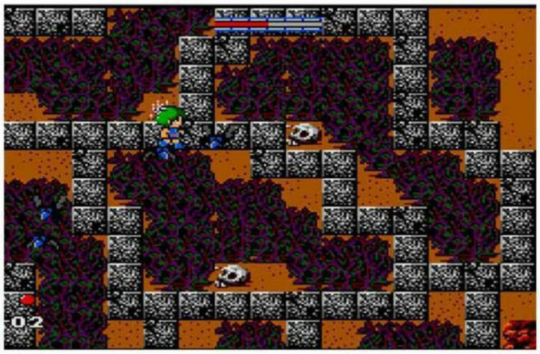
This is one of the more in depth and lengthy games on the Master System, and for the most part it still holds up today. If you are a fan of the genre it should be on your list of games to try.

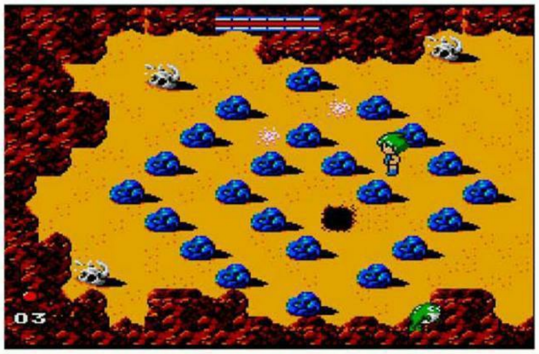

POWER
CRYSTAL
GOLDMAX
1000
GOLD
720

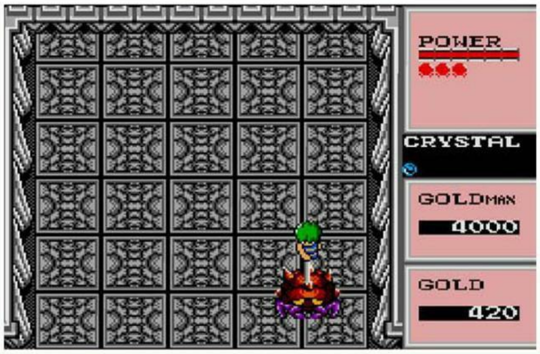

POWER
GOLD
4000
GOLD MAX
4000

BRAVE WARRIOR!
THOU DEFEATED ROLICK
BRAVELY! I SELL CRYSTAL
FOR 3000 GOLD.
WANT / ⇨DON'T WANT





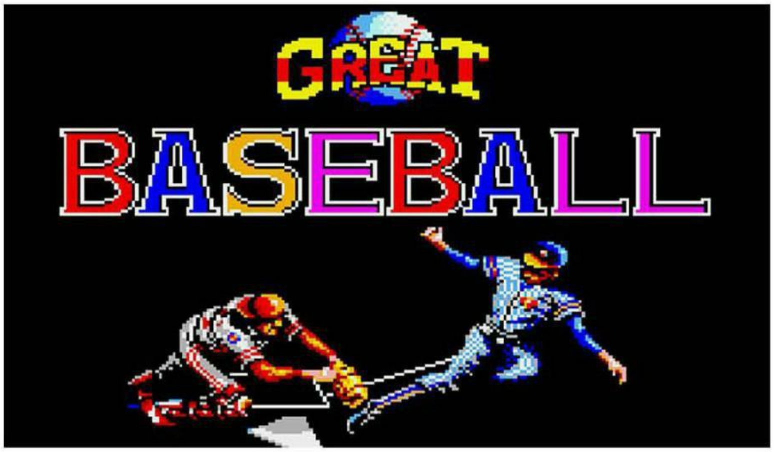



POWER
CRYSTAL
GOLDMAX
4000
GOLD
420

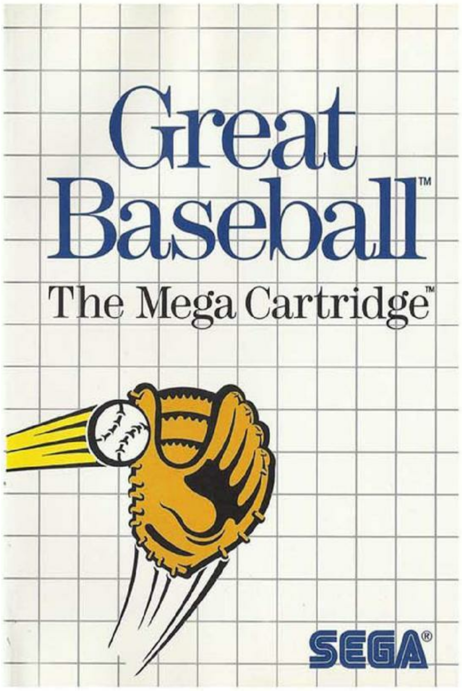
GREAT BASEBALL

Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Sports - Baseball
Players: 1-2


GREAT
BASEBALL

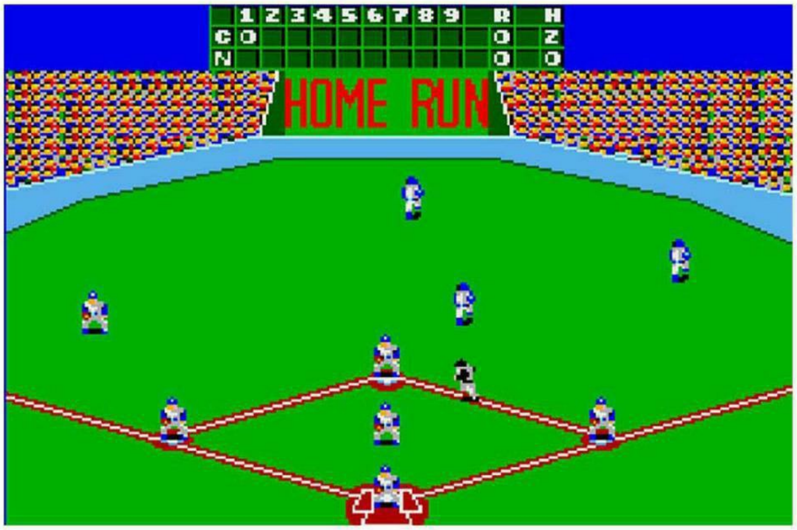
Great Baseball is a passable baseball title that doesn't come anywhere close to achieving greatness. At the start you are given three gameplay options. The standard one player game, two player head to head, and a home run derby.

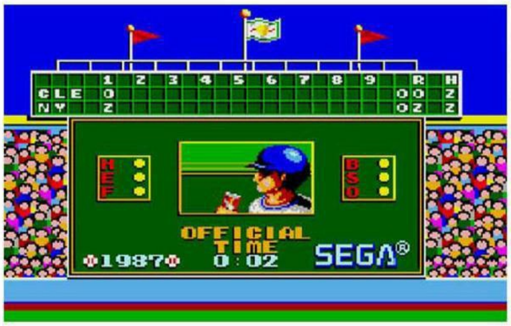

Great Baseball™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

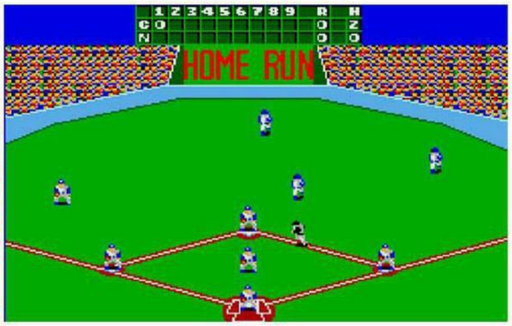
The main game has some pros and cons going for it. On the plus side the pitching is pretty nice as the camera is positioned behind the pitcher, so it's easy to line up your throws. Of course the downside is that even in the one player game the angle never changes even if you are batting, which turns what should be an exciting duel with the pitcher into a random "hit the button and pray" situation. Really the only two outcomes you can expect as a batter is a strike-out or a home run, since if you do connect you really connect.

There are other issues with the game, such as the AI. The base runners aren't programed for situational running, which means if they are on base and the ball is hit, they are running full steam ahead. Granted that's great if there are two outs or if you get a base hit, but more often than not they are just setting themselves up for a triple play on a random popup to the outfield.

The most troublesome problem in Great Baseball is the speed the fielders. The pitcher vs batter duel is pretty fast paced, however once the ball is in play it becomes slooowwwwww. Like midgets running a marathon slow. In most baseball games if you make light contact as the batter and send a dribbler slowly rolling between first and second base, you aren't going to be halfway to first before you are out and forced to walk back to the dugout with your head held in shame. Here however if you do that you'll be on your way to a standup double before the fielder can even reach the ball. The only reason this doesn't make the game unplayable is that it does it to both sides, so neither team has an advantage.



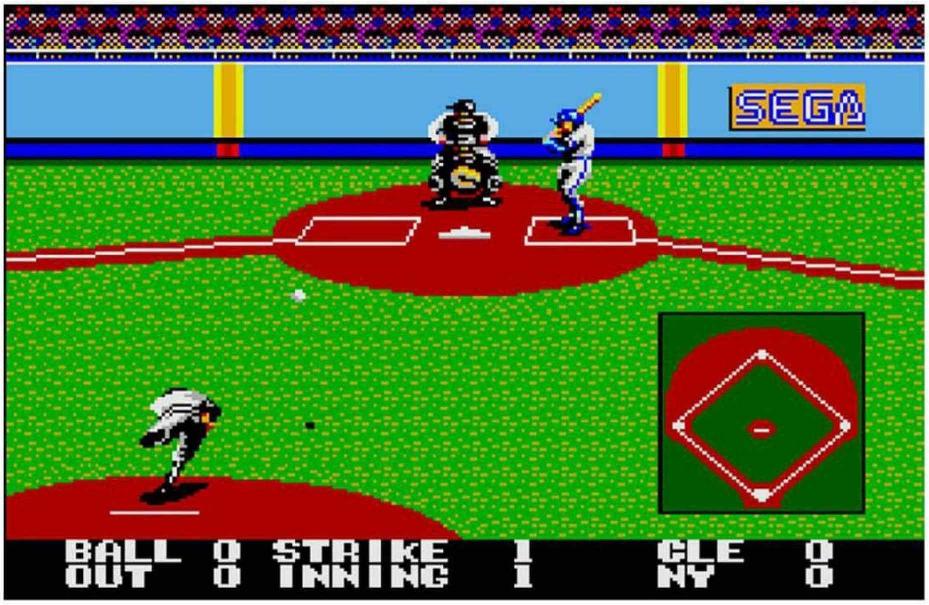

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 R H
CLE 0 0 0 2
NY 2 0 2 2
OFFICIAL TIME 0:02
©1987©
SEGA®


1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 R H
CO 0 2
N 0 0
HOME RUN

(Side Note: There is some simple voice digitization here that is pretty standard for an 8-bit title, but be sure you hit a few foul balls because I swear that instead of the announcer yelling "foul" it sounds like he's being murdered.)

The only other gameplay option is the home run derby, and it's just what you think it is. An opposing teams pitcher throws you fastballs and you try to hit as many out of the part as you can. Just like batting in the game normally there is no amount of skill that will help you here, only dumb luck.

Basically if you are hard up for a baseball game and this is your only option, you can do a whole lot worse. Just don't get your hopes up due to "great" being in the title.

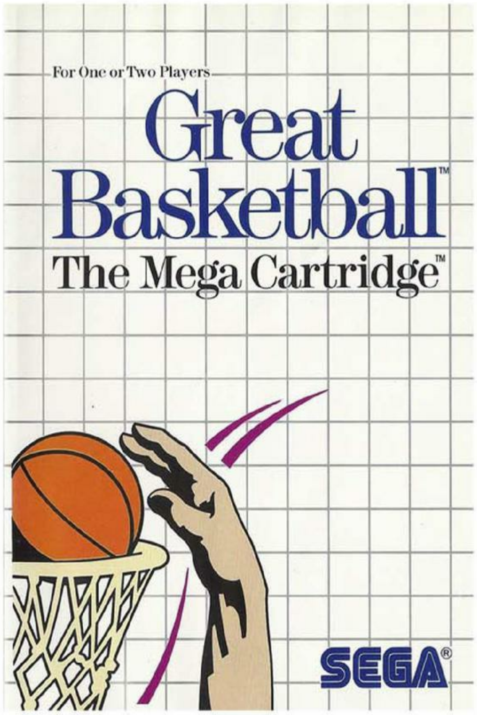

SEGA
BALL 0 STRIKE 1 CLE 0
OUT 0 INNING 1 NY 0

GREAT BASKETBALL

Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Sports - Basketball
Players: 1-2

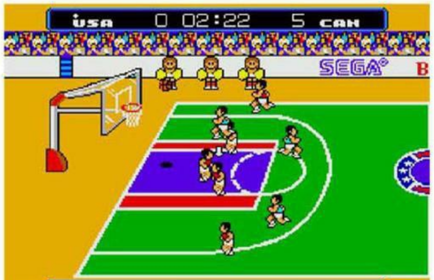
GREAT
BASKETBALL

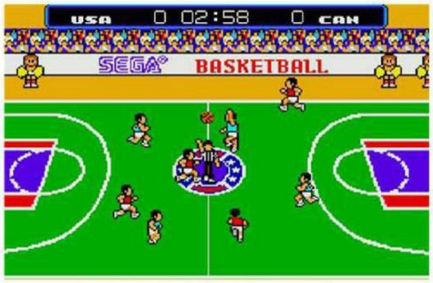

For One or Two Players
Great
Basketball™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

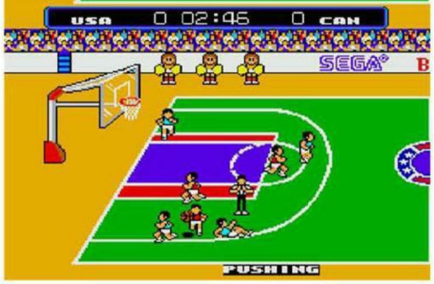
Great Basketball is another entry into the Sega Master System "Great" sports series. While it doesn't exactly qualify as great, it still qualifies as basketball. Barely.

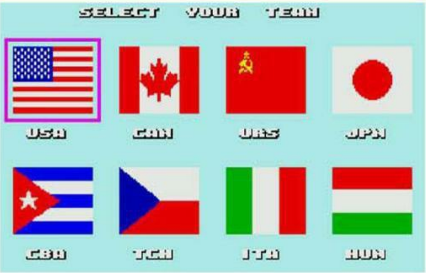
As soon as you hit start you get to pick from one of 8 countries, and upon your selection you will be greeted with the highlight of the game, a stirring 8-bit rendition of that countries national anthem. Yes, the rest of the game really is that bad that the national anthem before the game starts is the best thing about the game. The graphics admittedly aren't that bad, but the gameplay renders this game all but unplayable. The game is broken into two 3 minute halves, there are no timeouts to speak of, and no substitutions. But enough about the basics, let's breakdown just how impossibly bad this game is.

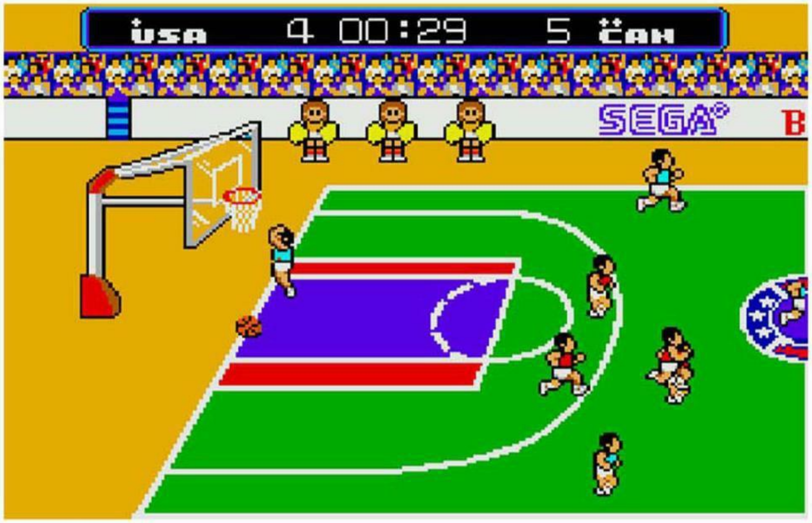
The point of basketball is to put the ball in the basket, and it has never been more difficult to do than it is right here. When you go up for a shot your player leaps to the rafters with the ball above his head, holding it until you hit the button again to make him shoot. That's all good since a lot of games use the two button shoot process, however the players here apparently have aspirations to become professional baseball pitchers because every single shot is a line drive directly towards the rim. It's so bad that the ball will often bounce all the way to mid-court after a three-point shot miss. It's so bad that the shooting mechanics in the original Atari 2600 Basketball are more realistic (not to mention easier to do). It's so bad and so difficult to make a shot that even the designers knew it. How else do you explain the players jumping up and down in celebration after each made shot? Even the computer has problems making shots. The half-time score of my first game was 7-4, and thanks to a scoring barrage in the second half I was able to push the final score up to 15-12. I committed more fouls than I made baskets.



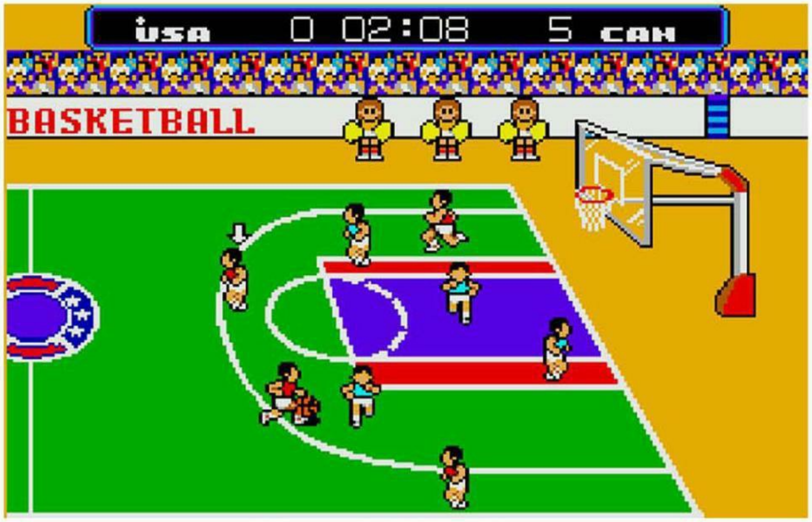






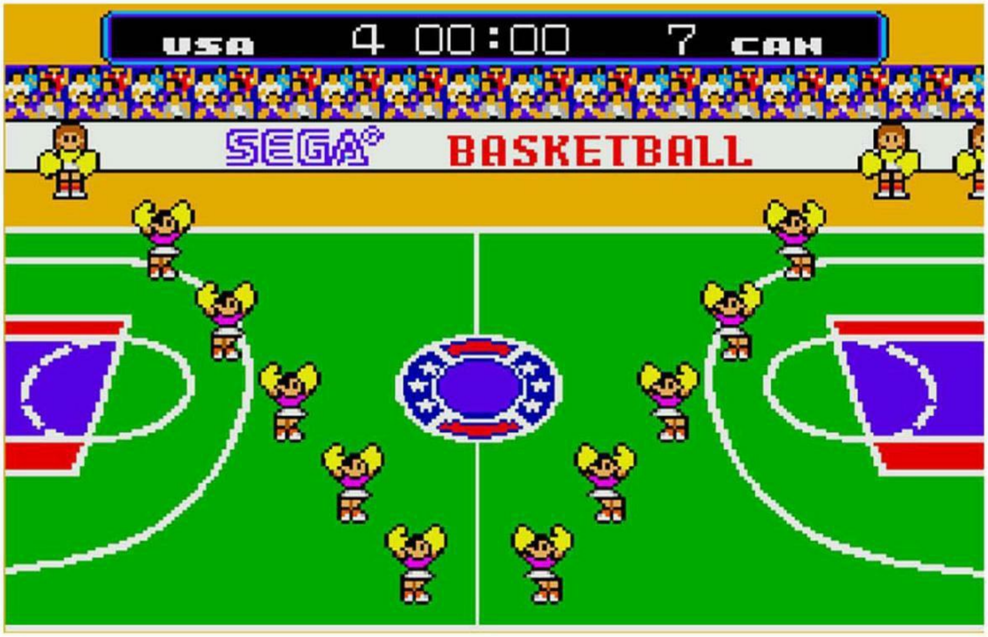


Which brings me to the other crippling flaw in the game, defense. Usually in games you can defend your basket by stealing the ball or swatting a shot into the third row. Here however defense is played by moving your player in position between the player with the ball and the basket, and just standing there. Either the computer player will pass the ball all the way back to his basket, or he will attempt to move toward you causing one of two things to happen. One of you will go flying and a charge or a push will be called. This happens every single time the ball handler comes in contact with an opposing player. To make things worse, it doesn't matter if you are moving or if you are hitting a button, you can and will be called for a push. Needless to say, the best defense in this game is played by the rim.



The only other thing of note is how incredibly ridiculously fast your player is when he doesn't have the ball. Not only can you run laps around everyone else on the floor, you can even become a one man team. On the rare occurrence that you get to inbound the ball under your own goal after the computer makes a shot you'll have the chance to pull off one of the single stupidest things ever to grace a basketball game. You don't really have any control over who the ball is thrown to, and since the AI is a taco short of a combo plate, the rest of your team is all standing underneath the basket at the other end of the court. As a result when you throw the ball in you heave it down court, and if you are quick enough you can actually run the length of the court and catch the ball with the player that just inbounded it. The upside to this is that more often than not your player will be in prime position to let off a quick shot. Well that would be an upside if you could actually make a basket in the game.

If you happen to emerge victorious in your first game, your reward is another game against a different country. Of course if you lose in your first game your punishment is to play another game against a different country.



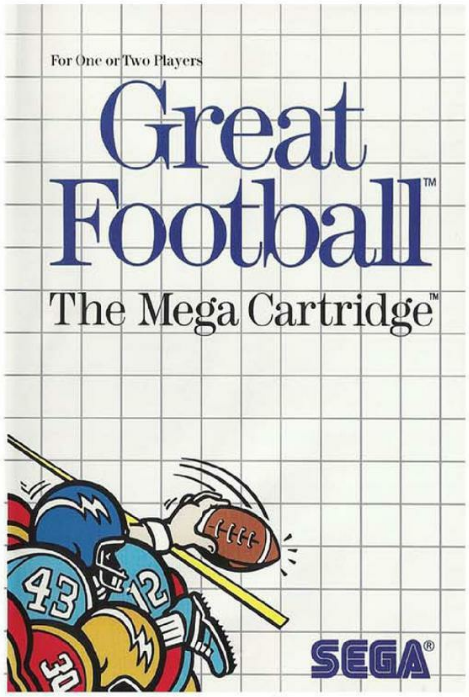
GREAT BASKETBALL

GREAT FOOTBALL

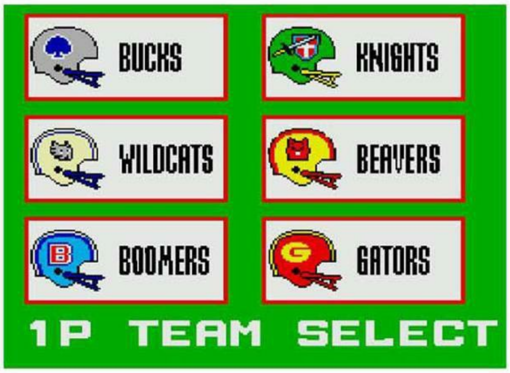
Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

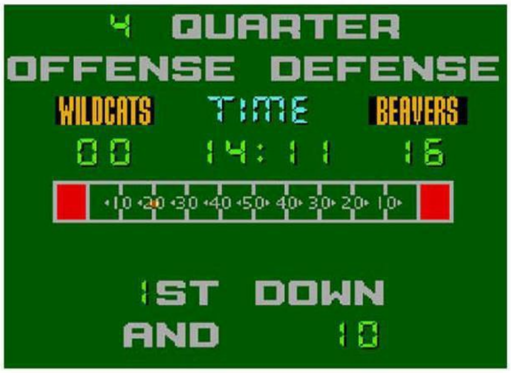
Genre: Sports - Football
Players: 1-2

GREAT
FOOTBALL

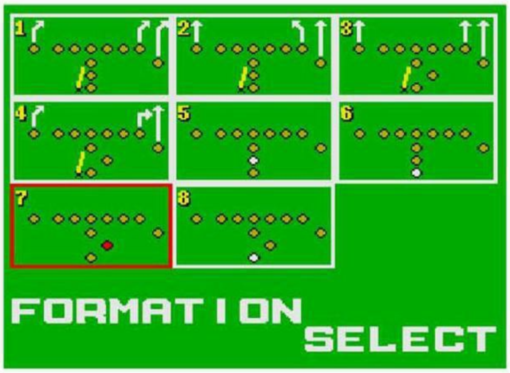

For One or Two Players
Great Football™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

Great Football is a football game, even though it's not exactly great. Actually upon further review it's only half a football game.


BUCKS
KNIGHTS
WILDCATS
BEAVERS
BOOMERS
GATORS
1P TEAM SELECT

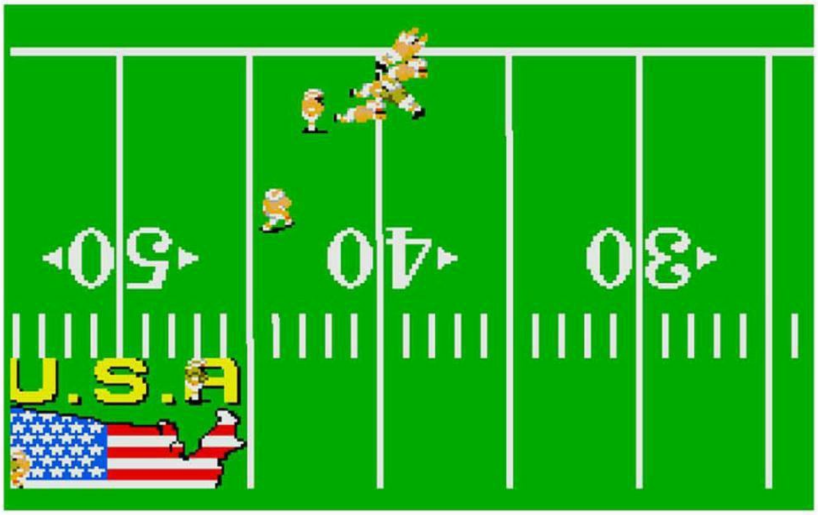

4 QUARTER
OFFENSE DEFENSE
WILDCATS
TIME
BEAVERS
00
14:11
16
1ST DOWN
AND 10

After selecting from one of the dozen generic teams, the computer kicks off to you. It is then that the game informs you that it is already in the fourth quarter and your team has done a mighty fine job of sucking up to that point since the computer is up multiple scores. The scores vary wildly from game to game. Some games you'll find yourself down 16-0, other times you'll be down 38-0. If you happen to get one of the 38-0 holes to climb out of do yourself a favor and just hit reset since you'll barely have enough time on the clock to come back from 16 down. The good news is that you have eight plays at your disposal to pick from (nine if you are in field goal range) to help you even the score. The bad news is that the game cycles through each and every one of them every time you have to pick a play.


1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
FORMATION SELECT

The plays are broken down into four pass and four run. Now given that the passing game is completely broken in that every time you step back to pass you get sacked, and if by some miracle you get a pass off it is only for a four yard gain, you are left with four run plays to pick from. Now, out of those your runner starts way in the backfield on three of them, meaning that by the time he hits the line of scrimmage the defense is running at him at full speed. Which basically leaves play number 7, the pitch to the wide back. With this play you'll actually be able to get to the outside and gain some positive yardage before the defense tracks you down (and track you down they will). You can make the first tackler miss and have twenty yards between you and the nearest defender, unfortunately for you their linebackers are also world class sprinters since they will have you at the bottom of a dog pile before you can get an extra five yards.

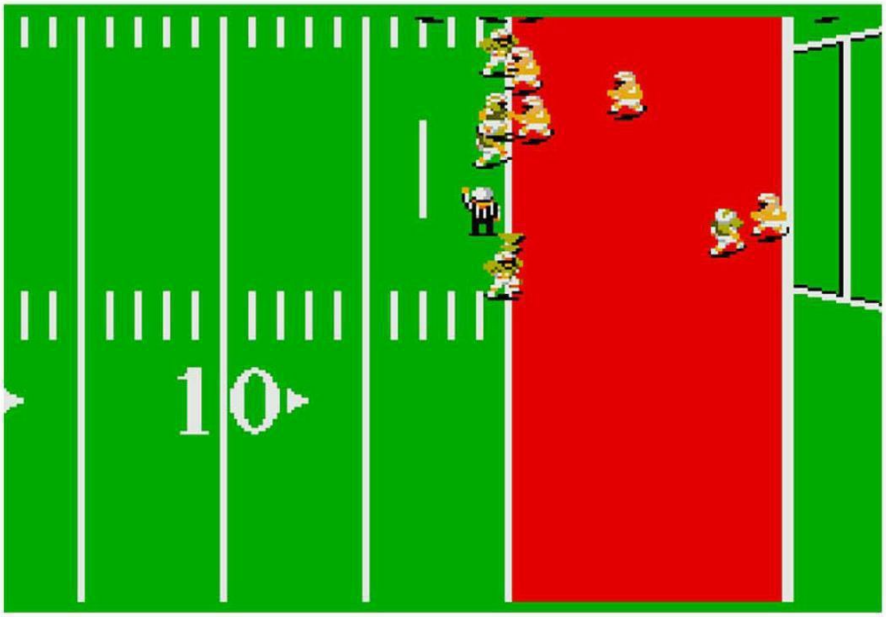
When you finally cross the goal line for a touchdown it's time for the extra point. If you are smart you will just run it in, because the kicking game is one of the most broken things ever to grace a video game. Unless you are hitting the proper direction at the time of your kick, the ball sails directly out of bounds. Not wide right, I mean straight out of bounds. Like if you kick from the 10 yard line, the ball goes out of bounds at the 10 yard line. Normally this would make kicking field goals obsolete, however the game already achieves that thanks to the only punishment for failing to convert a first down is a mere 10 yard penalty. Same thing if you throw an interception (which just leads me to believe that the defense wants to mock you so much that they catch the ball, stroll 10 yards and just set it on the ground).

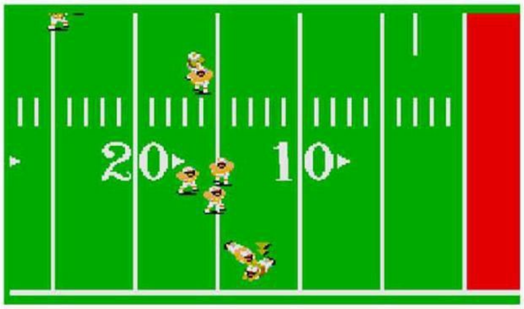


Now that you've scored the computer kicks off to you again in a transparent attempt to mock you, as if to say "hey, we have such a big lead that we can just keep giving you the ball and there's no way you're going to win. Losers". Then it's lather rinse repeat until you either win or time runs out (usually the latter).

Bottom line, if you are looking to lead a frantic fourth quarter comeback against a team full of sprinters then Great Football is for you. If you actually want to play a full game of football you should look elsewhere.

Side Note: This game was also released later as Sports Pad Football, which was identical except for the required use of the incredibly poor sports pad trackball controller.





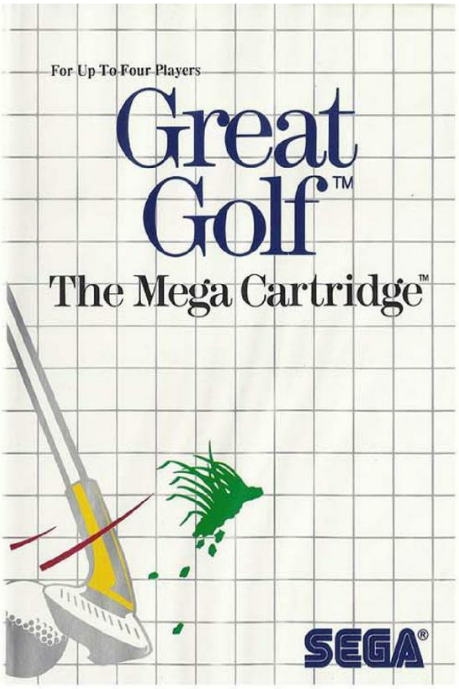
GREAT GOLF

Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Sports - Golf
Players: 1-2

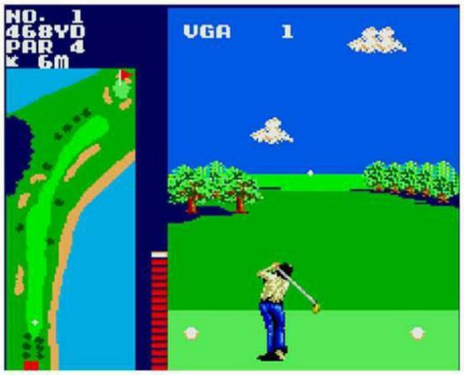
GREAT
GOLF
1
GOLF
3

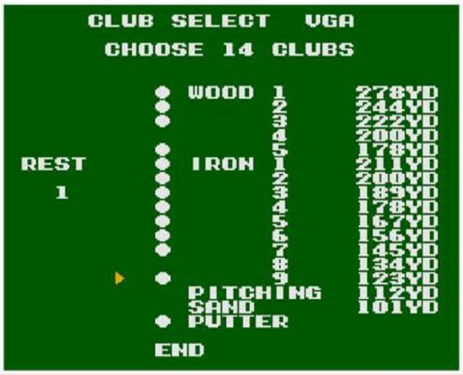
Great Golf is yet another entry into the "Great" sports series that comes nowhere close to greatness. The only part of this game that even comes close to achieving greatness is the way it perfectly captures the frustrations of average people on the golf course.


For Up To Four Players
Great
Golf™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

There are two modes of play, either stroke or match play. The only difference between the two is if you want to golf against a friend or if you are going it alone. There are no tournaments to partake in, no computer golfers to best, just you against the links (or in the match play mode, you against a friend and the links). Regardless of which mode you pick, you will be faced with an incredibly stiff learning curve thanks to the fact that the game was apparently made by knowledgable golfers who didn't feel like dumbing down the game for everyone else.

As you step into the tee box you have the relevant information in the top corner (i.e. par, wind speed, distance to hole, etc), and you are prompted to select your club, which is pretty standard throughout every golf game that came out post Atari 2600. What isn't standard is that while you are selecting your club there is absolutely no indication of what the yardage is of the club you are selecting. So unless you know exactly how far a nine iron is going to hit the ball compared to a five wood, you are just left to guess. And as anybody who has ever played a round of golf by just guessing at what club they need will tell you, this is going to be a long afternoon.



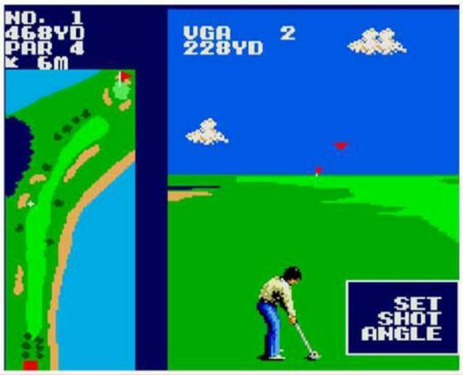

CLUB SELECT VGA

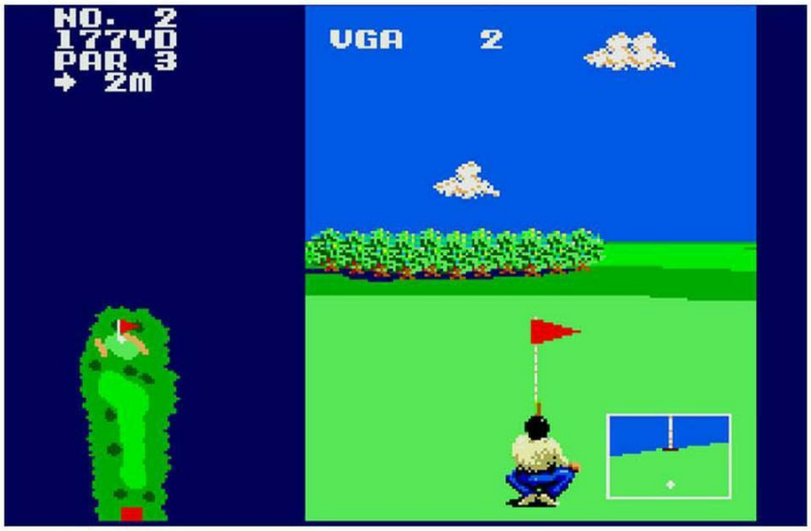
CHOOSE 14 CLUBS

REST 1

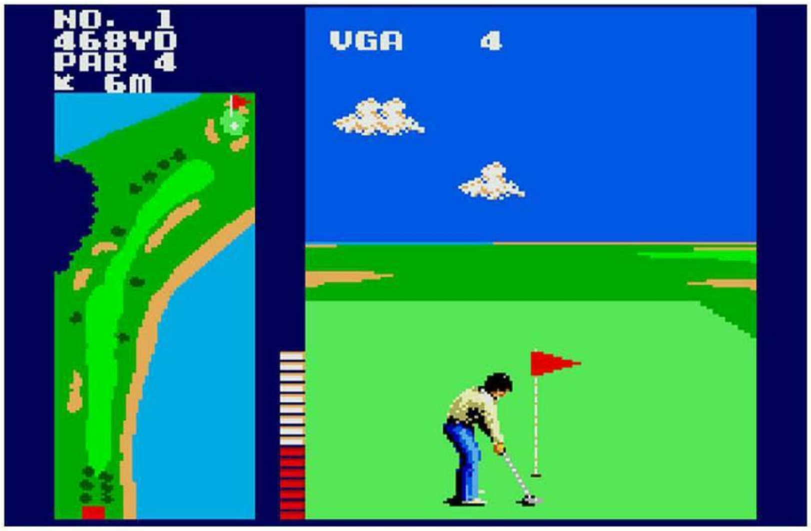
	●	WOOD	1	278YD
	●		2	244YD
	●		3	222YD
			4	200YD
	●		5	178YD
	●	IRON	1	211YD
	●		2	200YD
	●		3	189YD
	●		4	178YD
	●		5	167YD
	●		6	156YD
	●		7	145YD
			8	134YD
▶	●		9	123YD
		PITCHING		112YD
		SAND		101YD
	●	PUTTER		

END





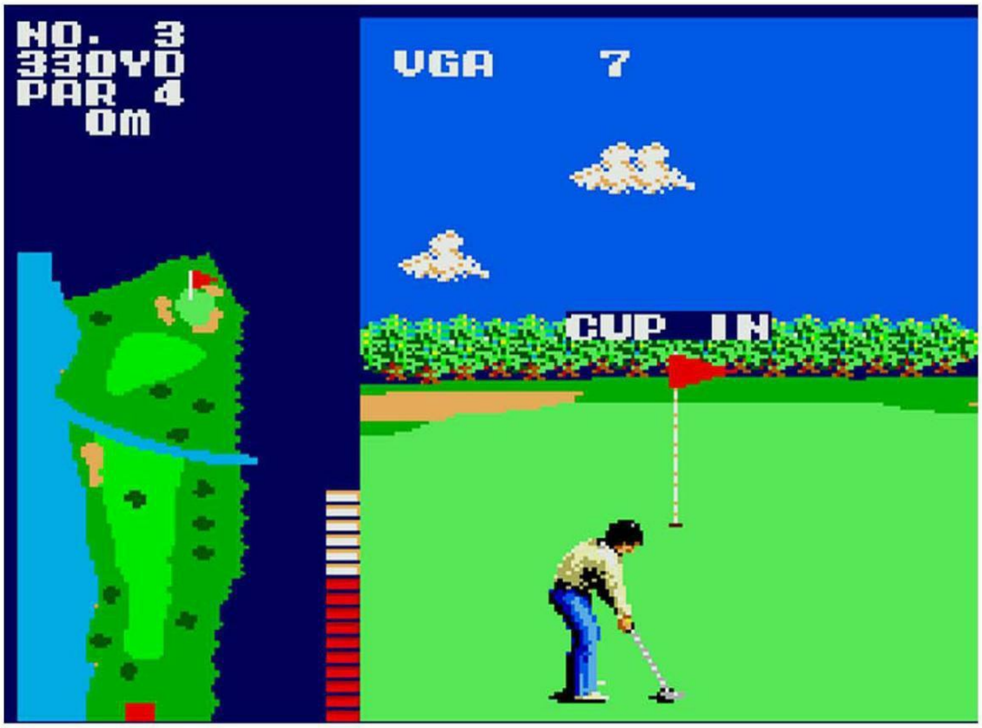
To make this situation even worse, the angle and power meters are difficult to use effectively. For the angle the only thing you have at your disposal is an arrow in the distance pointing down at where you are aiming. Now if the arrow was accurate it would be one thing, but more often than not it's more of a general direction that the ball might head in. The power meter is actually pretty accurate, however when combined with the fact that the majority of players will have no idea how powerful the club they are using is, it's kind of meaningless. Expect to spend a lot of time watching your ball fly way over the green into the out of bounds area, only to be followed up with you overcompensating with the power meter and sending your ball into the water.



And if by some miracle you actually make it to the green you get the joy of trying to putt. You can get a read on the green and see the slope and if you are shooting uphill or downhill, but you will again be met with your nemesis the angle and power meter. It's really difficult to tell just how hard you need to hit your putt, which means you'll be watching your ball lip out of the cup and roll a couple dozen yards away more often than you see it going into the cup.

Once you finally taste success and see your triple bogey added to your score card you can take a moment and rejoice at the fact you only have to do that 17 more times. And if you are a masochist and actually finish the course, congratulations, your reward is, well, nothing since there is but a single course to play. Of course if you are a super duper masochist you can play the course again and try to set a new personal best.

Great Golf is the perfect video game for people who enjoy the frustrations of golf, but who are too lazy to go outside.



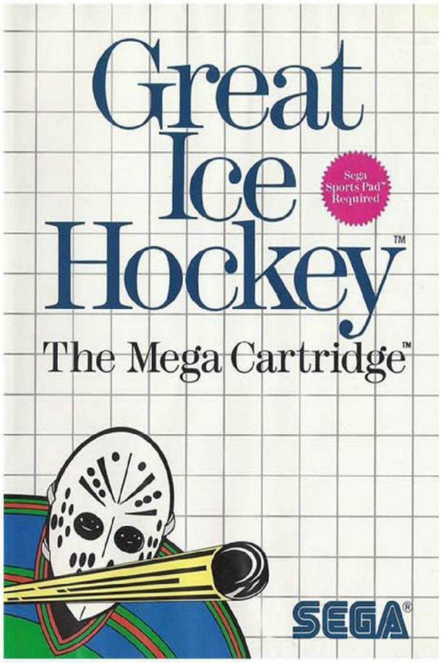
GREAT ICE HOCKEY

Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Sports - Hockey
Players: 1-2

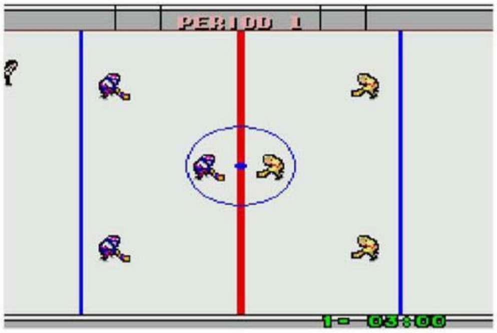
GREAT
ICE HOCKEY

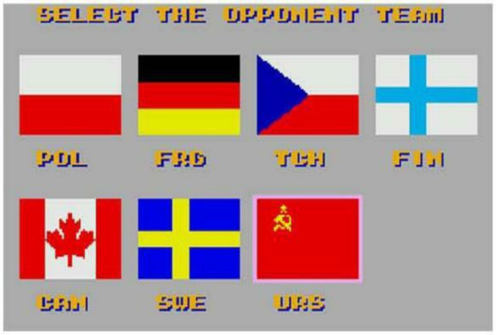
Great Ice Hockey is by far the most horrid entry into the "Great" sports series. It's simply amazing how many things can go wrong with a simple hockey game.

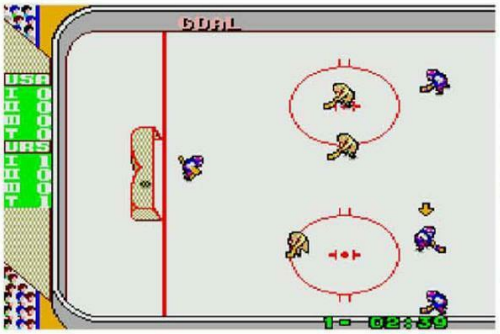

Great
Ice
Hockey™
Sega Sports Pad™ Required
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

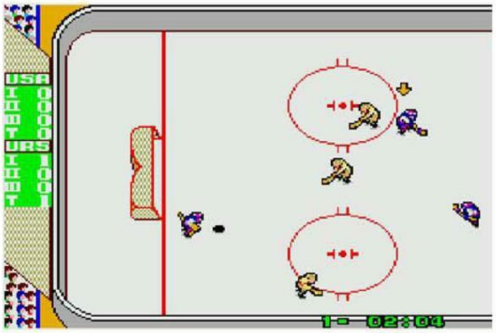
For starters you don't get to pick your team. Apparently the designers were patriotic Americans, so they decided you must always play as the red, white, and blue. Granted this doesn't impact the gameplay since all the teams are identical except for jersey color, but come on what's wrong with a little choice? After being assigned the American team you do get to choose your opponent from the seven remaining countries (and hear the recycled 8-bit national anthem that was used in Great Basketball). Choose wisely because this will be the only team you get to play since there is no tournament or season mode.

Once the game begins there are a whole host of problems that render the game virtually unplayable. Hockey is a very fast paced game, so naturally it was determined that the best way to represent that in video game form was to slow the game down to a crawl. To make things feel even slower, the rink is split up into three sections that jump back and forth. Normally in hockey games the entire rink loads and the screen follows the puck around, in this case however the blue lines act as hard boundaries, so whenever the puck goes over it the screen shifts in the same way that the screen shifts in The Legend of Zelda when Link moves to the next screen. Everything pauses while the action shifts, which really breaks up the action, not to mention is headache inducing when you or the computer constantly passes the puck back and forth over the line.



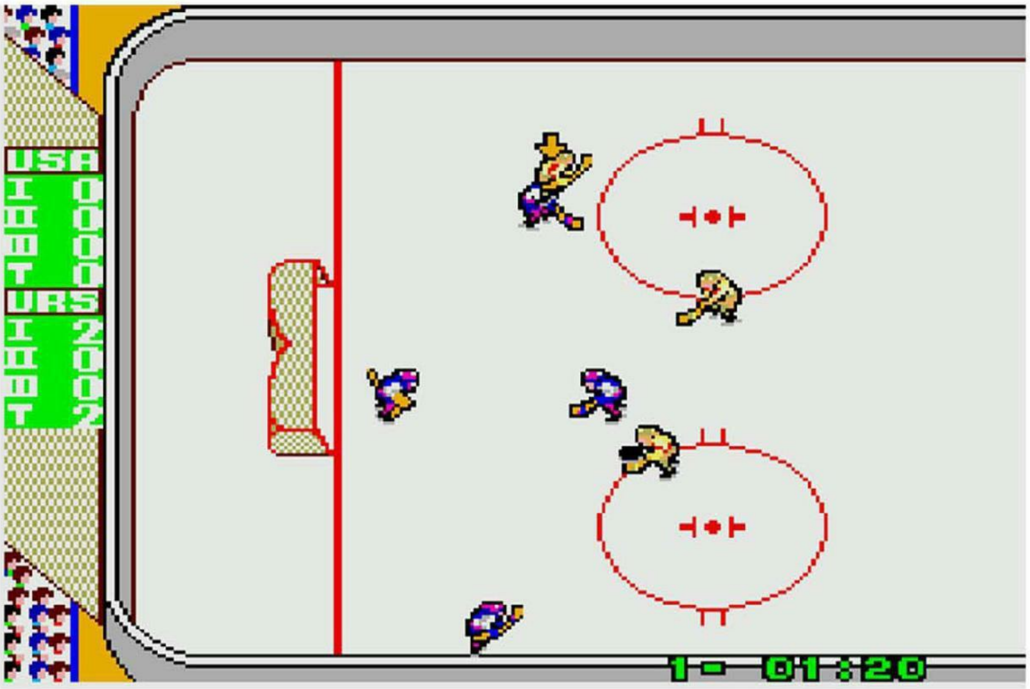






Goaltending is another thing that breaks the game. Whenever the puck gets close to the net, you take over control of the goaltender. This is a problem since you have to make the choice between defending the net or controlling your defensive players to try and get the puck. The usual outcome is either an opponent goal after shooting half a dozen times in succession thanks to the fact that your defensemen are halfway down the ice, or a face-off in your zone after successfully making a save.

The lone saving grace in this entire endeavor is that chances are you will never be subjected to just how awful this game is thanks to one simple fact, the Sports Pad Trackball. For some reason Sega decided to make the trackball peripheral mandatory for this game, which means if you want to play it you will have to track down a Master System, the game, and of course the trackball (which thanks to it only being compatible with two really bad games and being produced in small quantities they are extremely rare and cost nearly as much as they did new).



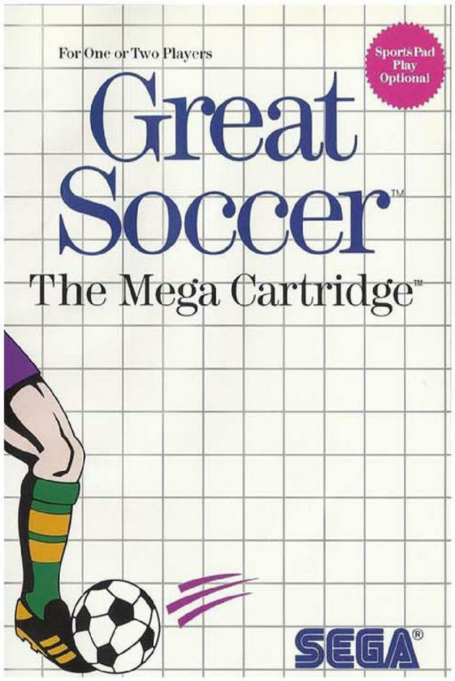
GREAT SOCCER

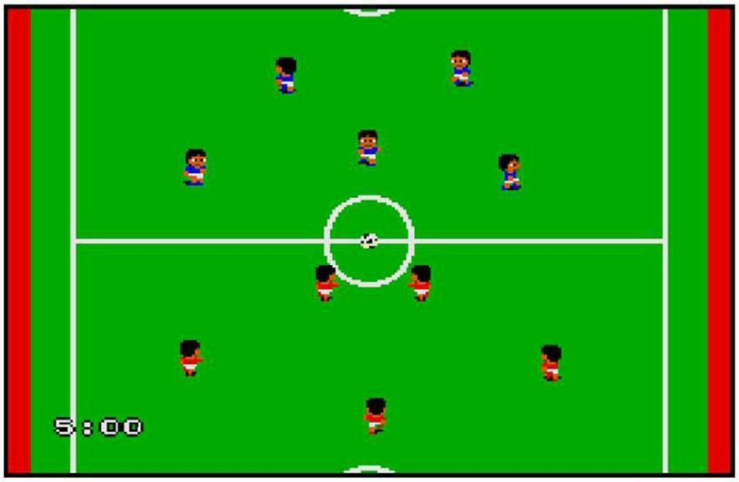
Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Sports - Soccer
Players: 1-2

Great
SOCCER

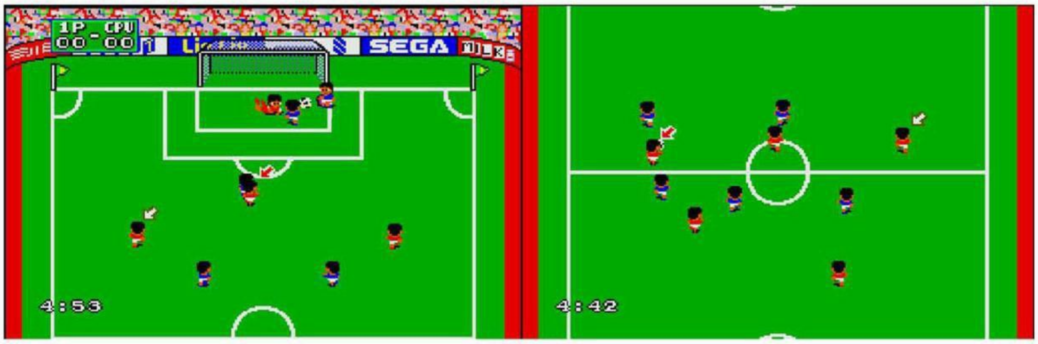
Great Soccer is one of the few playable entries into the "Great Sports" series.


For One or Two Players
Sports Pad Play Optional
Great Soccer™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®



The game is a basic six on six soccer match without any of the in depth stuff like offsides rules, or slide tackling for that matter. There are three levels of difficulty, which range from your computer opponent being as skilled as your seven year old son to Mega Pele, the cybernetic super soccer player from the future sent back in time to demolish any and all who challenge it to a game. Seriously, on the top level the computer will run circles around you.

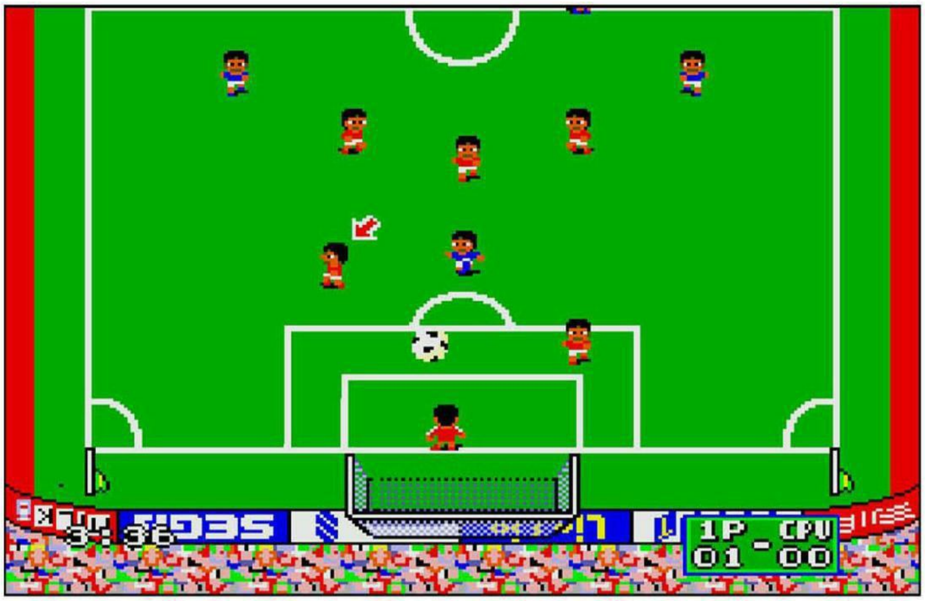
Everything seems to be running at a reduced speed since the players on the field are incredibly slow, plus it doesn't help matters that the field is broken up into three segments. Instead of being free flowing the action pauses every time you approach either goal (or leave that area to go to midfield) as the screen shifts. This can get particularly annoying when there are several turnovers right at one of the lines.



Offense can be difficult at times as your players have a hard time shooting or passing on the run. In order to shoot you have to move an arrow at the goal to the left or right, which gives the direction of your shot. The problem comes in when you are trying to navigate around defenders while moving up the field and having to aim, which basically means you have to be moving left right and up at the same time. Easier said than done. Defense isn't much better as the only thing you can really do is walk in front of the guy with the ball. No slide tackling, no speed burst, no nothing.

The biggest flaw in the game is the automatic player switching. Scratch that, the absolute biggest flaw in the game is when the opponent gets the ball near your goal. It is then that you assume control of the goalie. Sadly, not only do you have control of the goalie, but you also have control of your defender. So in essence, the game forces you to choose between trying to steal the ball with your defender or trying to block the shot with the goalie. Because no matter what you choose, you are going to be taking one of them out of the play.

Despite that otherwise major flaw, Great Soccer is playable. Just don't expect anything close to greatness.



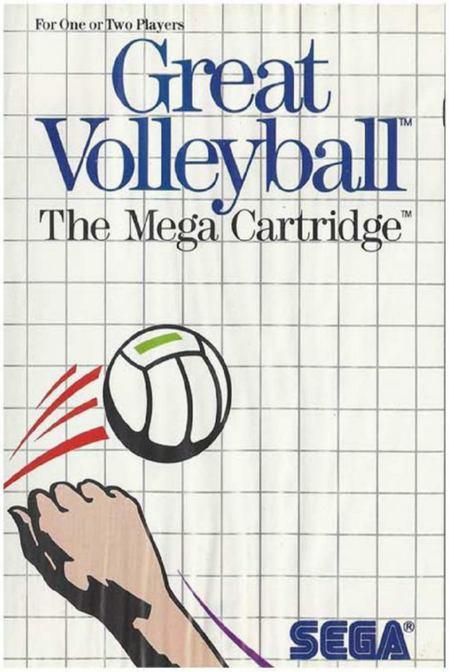
GREAT VOLLEYBALL

Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

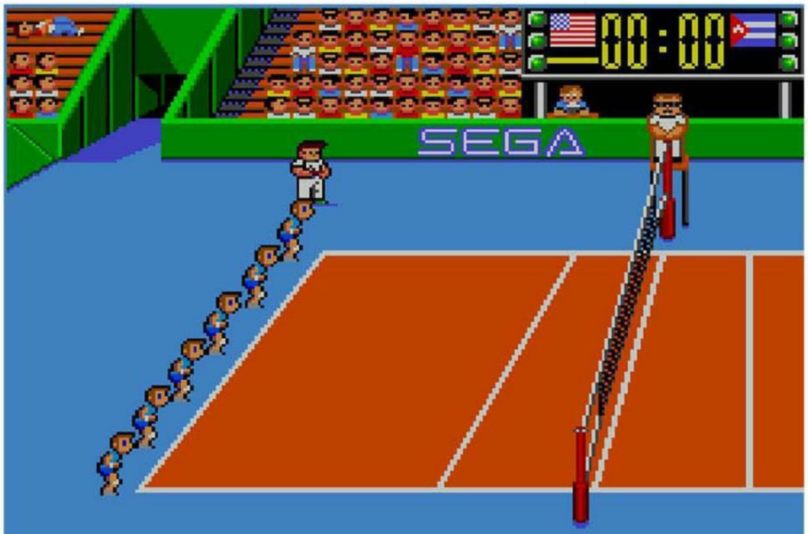
Genre: Sports - Volleyball
Players: 1-2

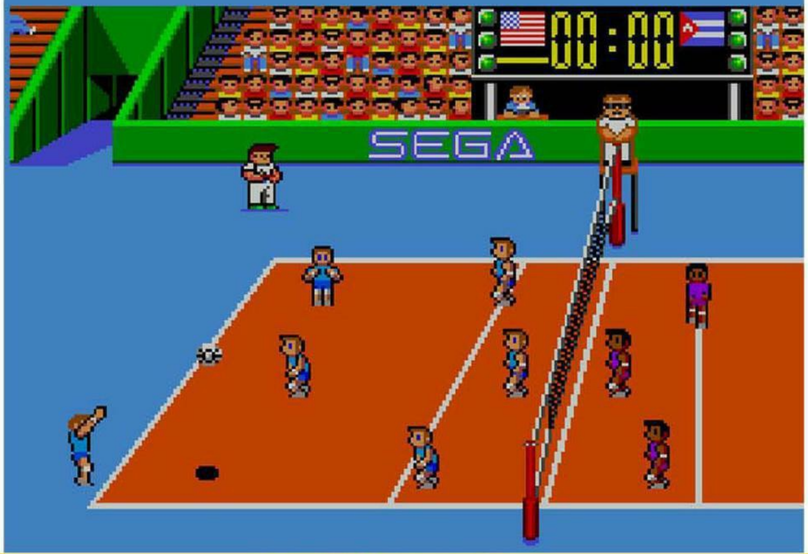
Great
VOLLEY BALL

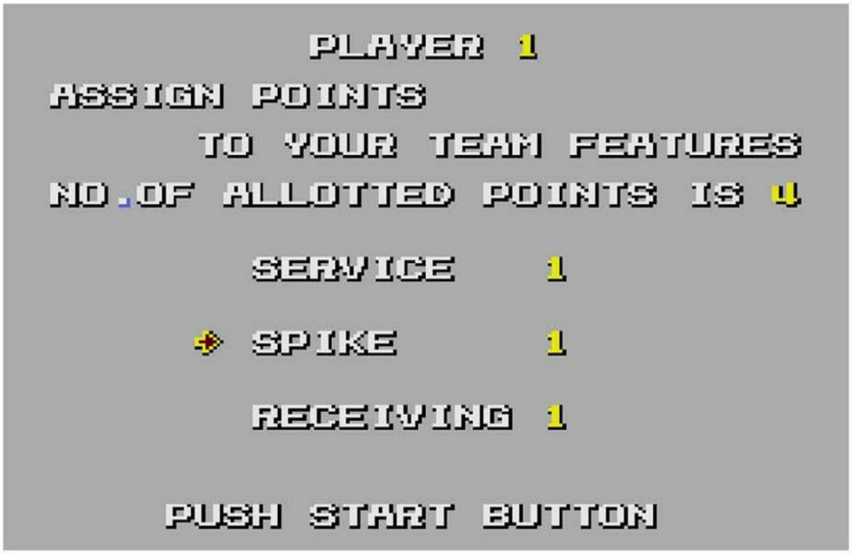
Great Volleyball is hands down the best of the Great Sports series. Not only is it the best of the bunch, but it actually approaches greatness (well, greatness for an 8-Bit sports simulation).


For One or Two Players
Great Volleyball™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

At the start you have the choice of three gameplay modes. If you are new to the game you should start out with the practice mode, as there is an incredible amount of depth to be found here. Aside from the normal "bump, set, spike" found in volleyball, there are also commands to dive, jump serves, directional hitting, and a whole host of other things to master. And given that the computer is absolutely ruthless, you are going to need each and every one of those skills if you are to compete. The second gameplay mode is called Goodwill Match, which is the equivalent of an exhibition match. The final gameplay mode is the Tournament, which is really where you need your "A" game.







PLAYER 1

ASSIGN POINTS

TO YOUR TEAM FEATURES

NO.OF ALLOTTED POINTS IS 4

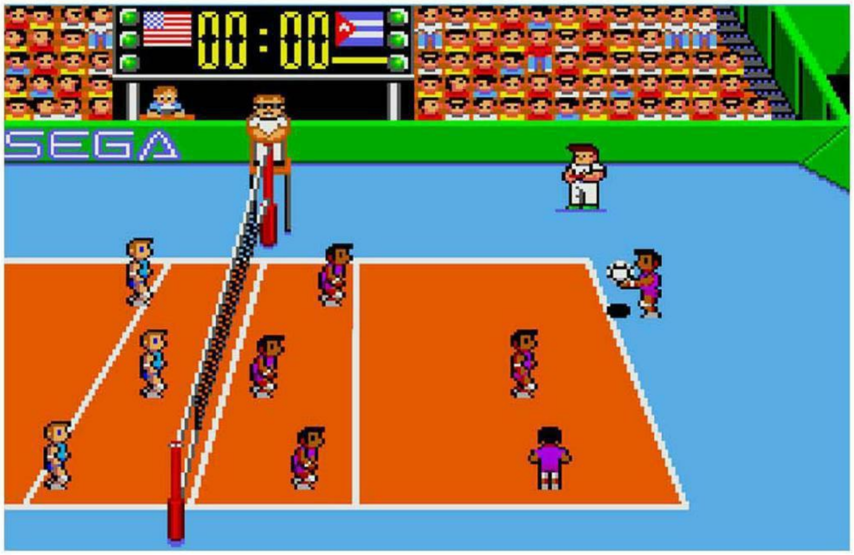
SERVICE 1

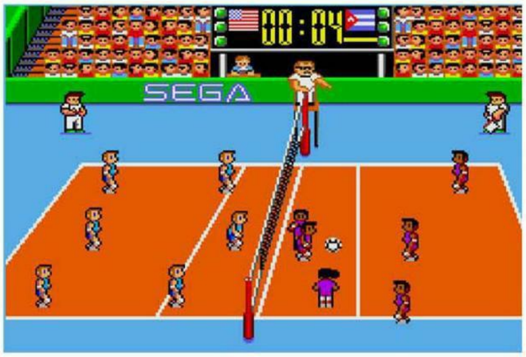
SPIKE 1

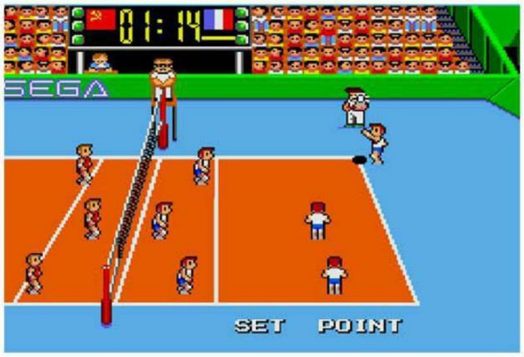
RECEIVING 1

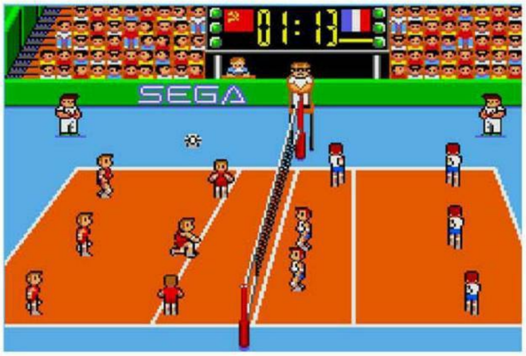
PUSH START BUTTON

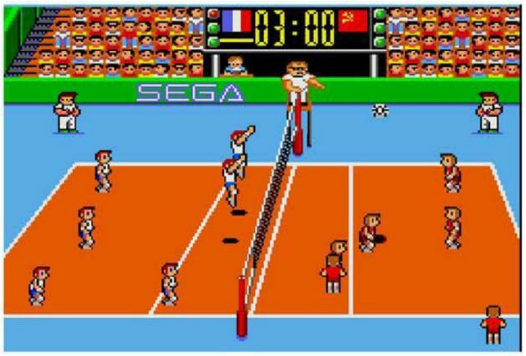
Before beginning the tournament you get to select from eight international teams (that have wonderful 8-Bit renditions of their national anthems). From there you are taken to a team management screen where you can add bonus points to your team in one of three categories (Service, Spike, Receive). For the first match you only have one bonus point to add to improve your team, but after each victory you gain more points. While it isn't incredibly deep, it is a nice touch that allows you some ability to tweak your team the way you like it.











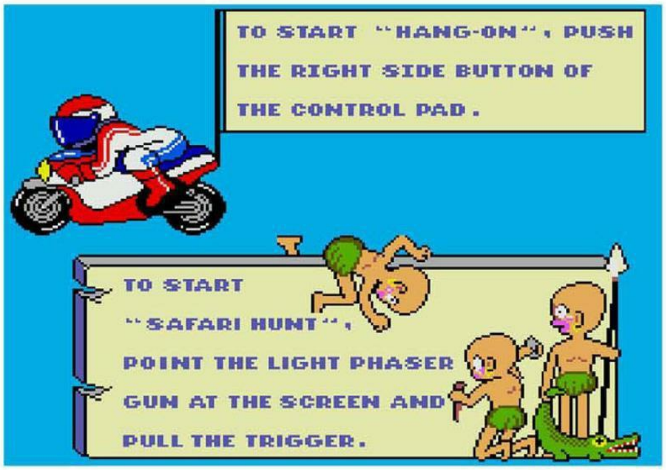
The match itself is very solid all the way around with its fast paced six on six action. The ball is really easy to follow, although the movement of the shadow can be a little spotty at times which gives the computer some cheap points. The matches are best two out of three sets, and given the expertise with which the computer possesses, they can get out of hand quickly. Sadly there isn't a difficulty setting, however it just means you have an extra sense of satisfaction when you finally win a match. Well, I assume there is, I never actually came close to winning one. I did however feel a sense of relief when I finally scored to make the tally 11-1. It's the little victories.

Out of the seven Great sports games on the Sega Master system, Great Volleyball is the only one that is worthy of the "Great" distinction.

HANG-ON/SAFARI HUNT

Release Date: 1986
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

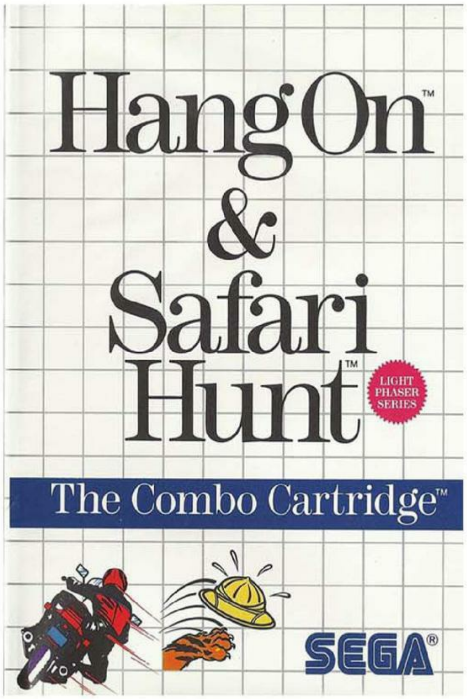
Genre: Racing/Light Gun Shooter
Players: 1



TO START "HANG-ON", PUSH THE RIGHT SIDE BUTTON OF THE CONTROL PAD.

TO START "SAFARI HUNT", POINT THE LIGHT PHASER GUN AT THE SCREEN AND PULL THE TRIGGER.

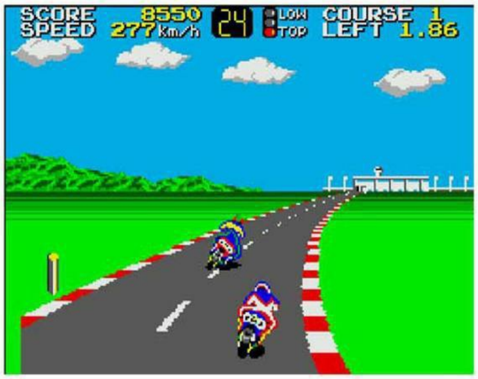
Hang On and Safari Hunt is a nice combo cart that was included with most of the early Master System consoles.

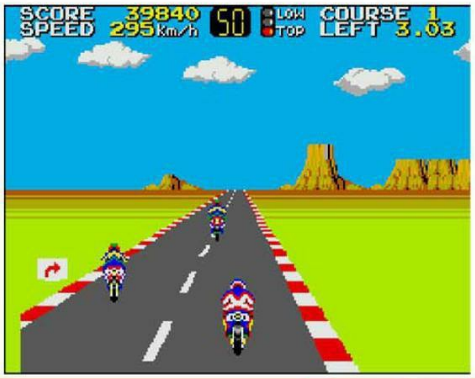

Hang On™
&
Safari
Hunt™
LIGHT PHASER SERIES
The Combo Cartridge™
SEGA®

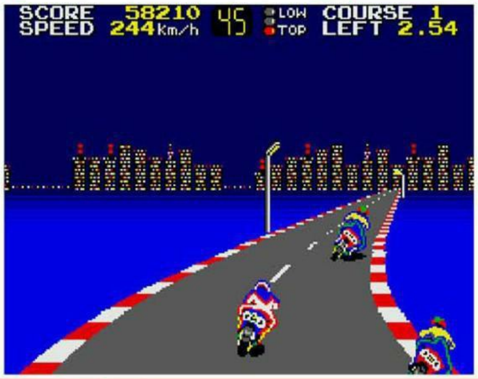
Hang on is a port of the classic arcade motorcycle racing game. The premise is quite simple, you are taking part in some sort of massive bike road race and you have to get from point A to point B in a certain amount of time. There are no places to fight for, instead you are only concerned with hitting the checkpoints within the time allotted. This is easier said than done thanks to the fact that you are riding the most dangerous bike ever conceived by man. Seriously, if you hit another biker, hit a lamp post, or even graze a bush you explode. Not fall off your bike, not wreck, but explode in a giant fireball. I'm not mechanic, but I'm going to go out on a limb and guess something wasn't designed properly.

There are three different skill levels to pick from at the start. The easiest level is very forgiving (at least at the start), and you can wreck during a segment and still have ample time to recover. Level three however not only allows you no margin for error, but also packs the road with rival bikers who will get in your way and, if you are too slow for their tastes, will run straight through you causing you to explode. Granted that might be a cool visual for the spectators, but it makes things incredibly difficult for you.

HANG-ON ™
PUSH START BUTTON
LEVEL 1
HI-SCORE 00
© SEGA 1985


SCORE 8550
SPEED 277km/h
24
LOW
TOP
COURSE 1
LEFT 1.86


SCORE 39840
SPEED 295km/h
50
LOW
TOP
COURSE 1
LEFT 3.03


SCORE 58210
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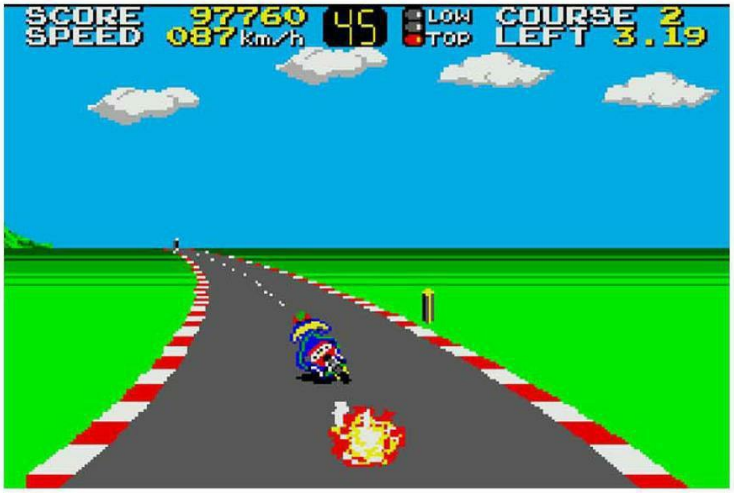
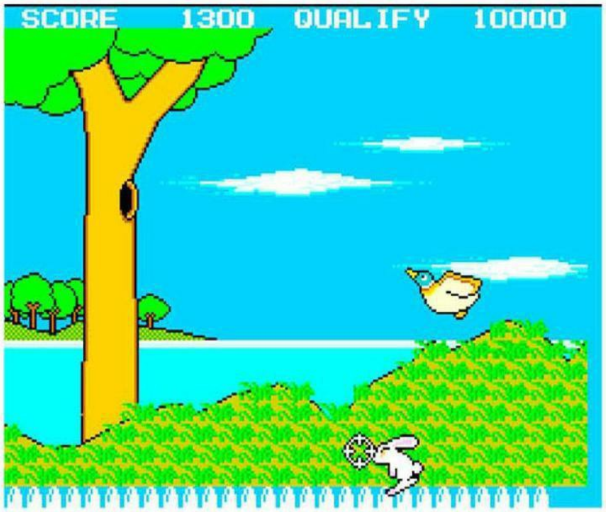
45
LOW
TOP
COURSE 1
LEFT 2.54



The controls are pretty tight, although they do take some time to get used to. In order to survive the later levels and harder skill settings you'll have to master the brakes and letting off the gas. Doing this will allow you to take those tight corners and swerve all the way across the road to avoid a wreck, which can make for some harry, if not exciting racing moments.

The other part of this cart is Safari Hunt, which takes advantage of the Master System light gun. Basically this is a glorified shooting gallery, with three different screens filled with every animal under the sun just begging for a digital bullet. Seriously, there is everything you can imagine. Birds, rabbits, fish, monkeys, giant spiders, panthers, bears, bats, and even an armadillo.



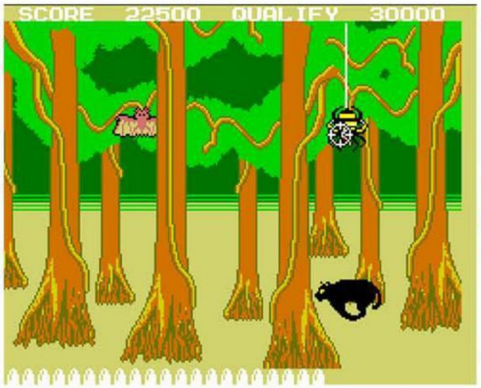
The goal in each level is to accumulate enough points to meet the threshold so you can continue your hunt. Instead of having level specific goals, you are given a cumulative score target. This is nice since if you are good enough on some levels you can pad your score and make it very easy to clear the next one since you'll be halfway there before you even begin.

The only downside is that once you figure out what the big point animals are, it's kind of pointless to waste your limited supply of bullets on anything else. Why shoot a bird (which humorously turns into a cooked bird when shot) worth a couple hundred points when you can shoot a fish for a thousand? That said, there is plenty of stuff to shoot, and plays like a more robust version of Duck Hunt (minus that laughing dog of course).

Even though both games are basic, they are solid. Plus it's kind of hard to complain since the game came packed with the Master System console. This cart was also released with Astro Warrior taking the place of Safari Hunt for consoles that did not come with the light gun.

SAFARI HUNT
PULL THE TRIGGER
TO START
©SEGA 1986

SCORE 33500 QUALIFY 41000

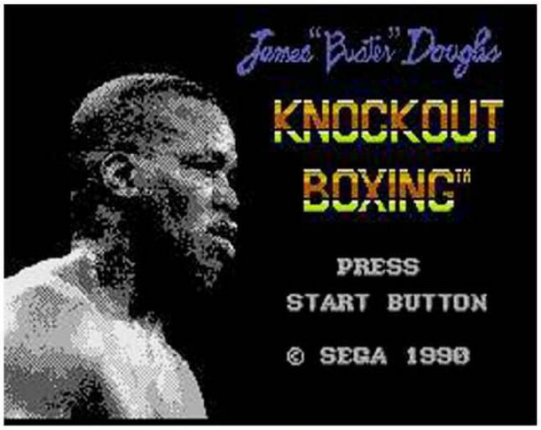

SCORE 22500 QUALIFY 30000

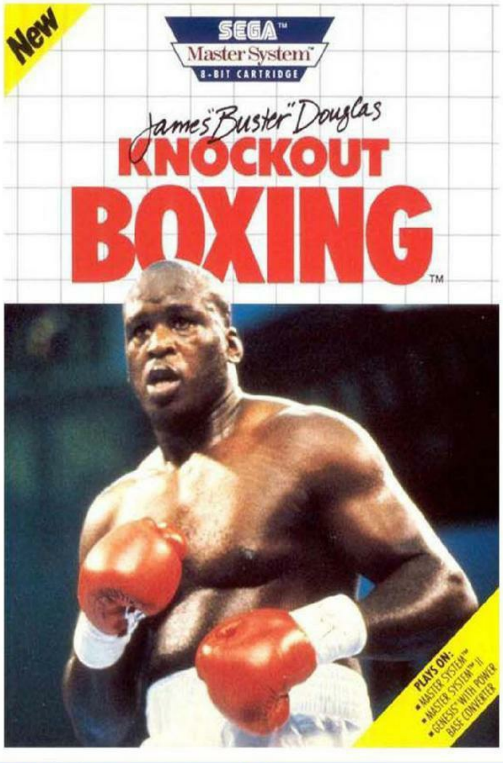
SCORE 49400 QUALIFY 52000

JAMES BUSTER DOUGLAS KNOCKOUT BOXING

Release Date: 1990
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Sports - Boxing
Players: 1-2

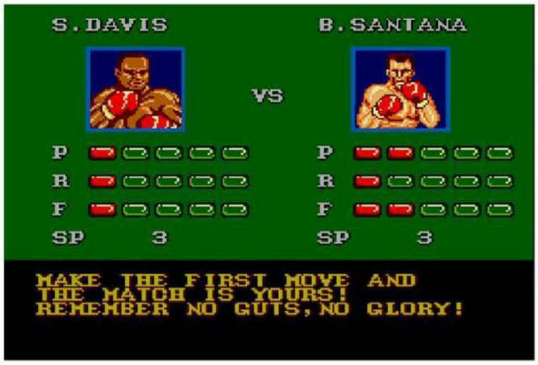

James "Buster" Douglas
KNOCKOUT
BOXING™
PRESS
START BUTTON
© SEGA 1990


New
SEGA™
Master System™
8-BIT CARTRIDGE
James "Buster" Douglas
KNOCKOUT
BOXING
™
PLAYS ON:
• MASTER SYSTEM™
• MASTER SYSTEM™ II
• GENESIS™ WITH POWER BASE CONVERTER

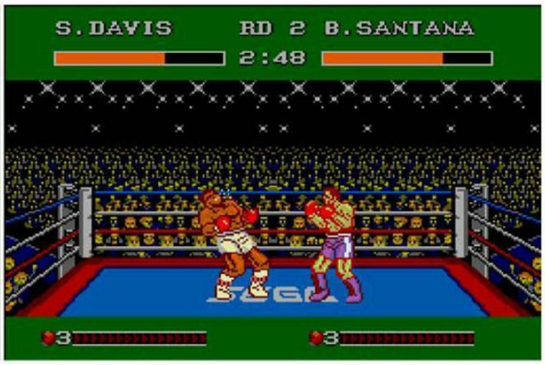
This is Sega's response to Nintendo's Mike Tyson's Punch Out. Well, not so much an answer as a not so subtle jab at them.

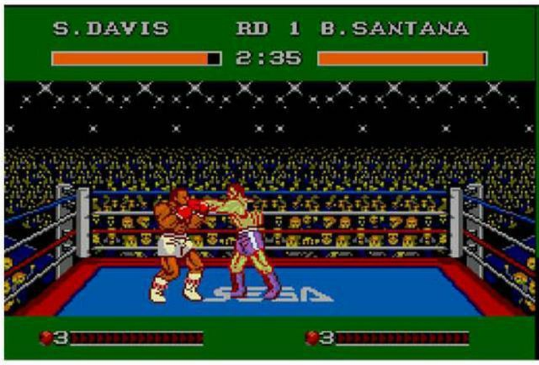
In the late eighties, Mike Tyson was a Nintendo poster boy. OK, he was the most dominant boxer the world had ever seen, but he also had a wildly successful Nintendo game to boot. Then one February night in 1990, James Buster Douglas, a 42-1 long shot, knocked him out, and in doing so gave Sega a way to counter punch Nintendo. Sadly however, the poorly designed Knockout Boxing didn't really do the trick. Instead of being fun like a video game should, it was about as dull as you can get. The boxers move from left to right, and way too slow. It takes them nearly ten seconds just to meet in the middle at the start of the round.

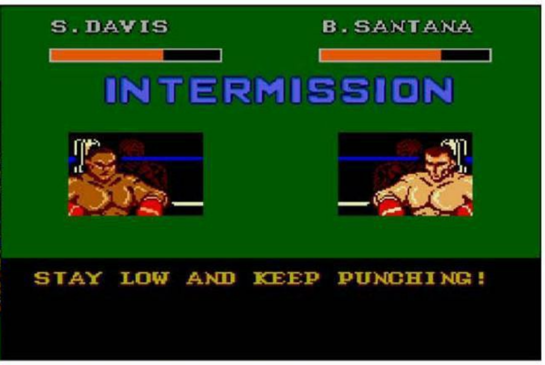
You start out with the tale of the tape, which shows you right off the bat that you are facing off against a much more powerful opponent. Get used to that as every single fight is going to be like that. You have various categories that you can power up with bonus points from winning fights, but no matter how many you have, the boxer you are facing off against will always have more. While this does add a bit of a challenge to the game as you are always facing an uphill climb, it can make for some incredible frustrations later on as you will get pummeled without any recourse other than falling face first onto the mat.



MAKE THE FIRST MOVE AND THE MATCH IS YOURS! REMEMBER NO GUTS, NO GLORY!

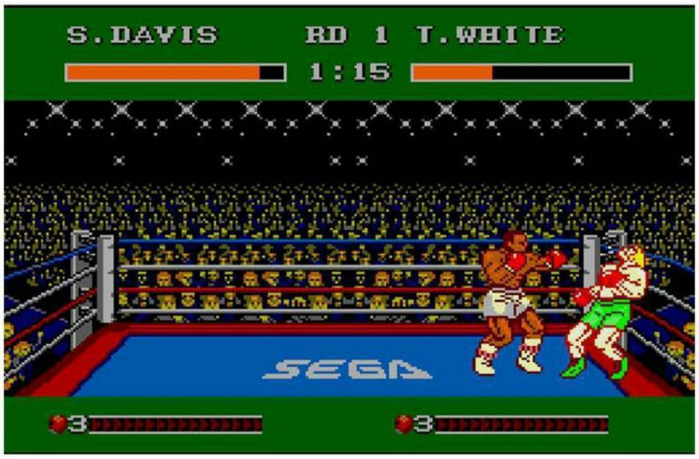




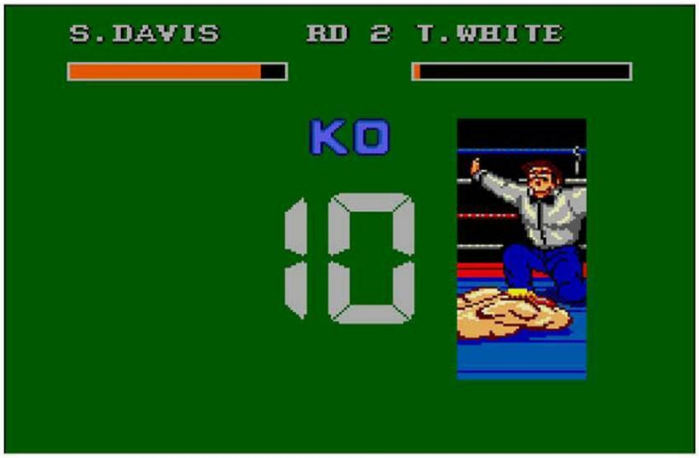


STAY LOW AND KEEP PUNCHING!

JAMES BUSTER DOUGLAS KNOCKOUT BOXING

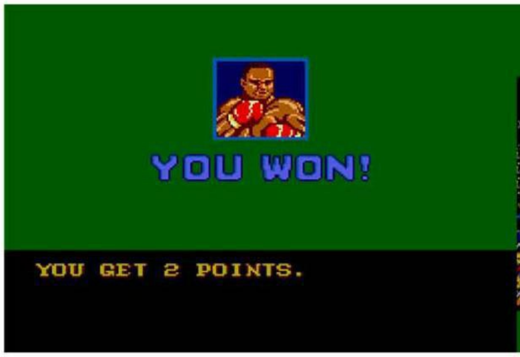


The boxing itself is pretty limited. You have a choice between three punches. A left handed jab, a right handed jab, or a powered up punch that has the potential to send your opponent flying across the ring. The power punches are a nice touch, but unfortunately you only get three per fight, and if you fail to connect with the punch you still lose it. Your standard punches take off very little, so the result is a war of attrition that can drag on and on for several rounds. The only way to really get the upper hand on your opponent is to work him back against the ropes, which is where the game becomes completely broken. If a boxer is backed into the ropes they will be punched repeatedly until they get knocked down, and without the ability to fight back. If you start the fight with a well timed power punch followed by pinning them in the corner, you can have their health bar down to a sliver before the first round is completed.

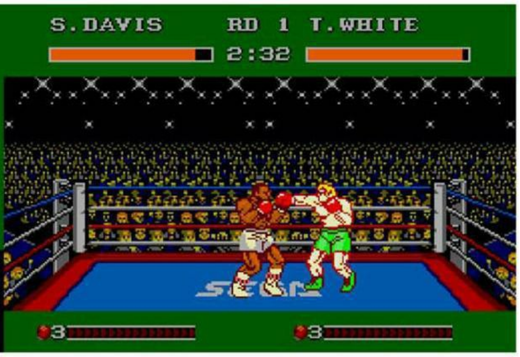


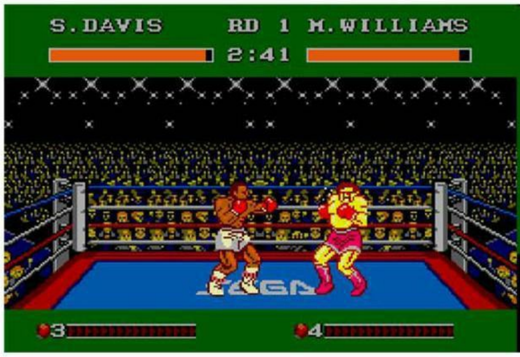
There are three ways to raise your fist in victory. First is a knockout, which is accomplished by completely draining the health bar of your opponent. A TKO can be had with three knockdowns, and the final way is to win on points. After each round the judges will give each boxer points (up to 10) based on how well they did. At the end of twelve rounds the boxer with the most points wins. Of course it is highly unlikely any fight will reach twelve rounds given that at some point either you or your opponent will become stuck in the corner of doom and be beaten to a bloody pulp.

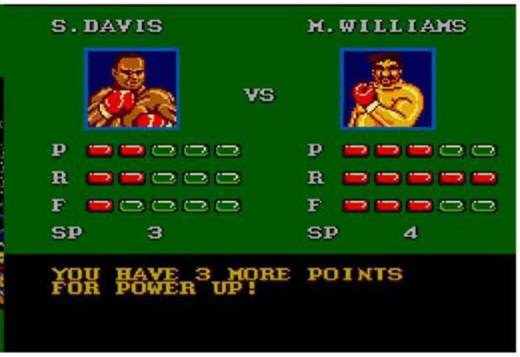
This is by far the rarest game on the Sega Master System, so if you plan on buying a complete copy for your collection, expect to spend at least a couple hundred bucks. Just don't expect to get your monies worth. (side note: Most pictures and the video are from the European version called Heavyweight Champ. An actual copy of the game was just far too difficult to come across for this).


YOU WON!

YOU GET 2 POINTS.





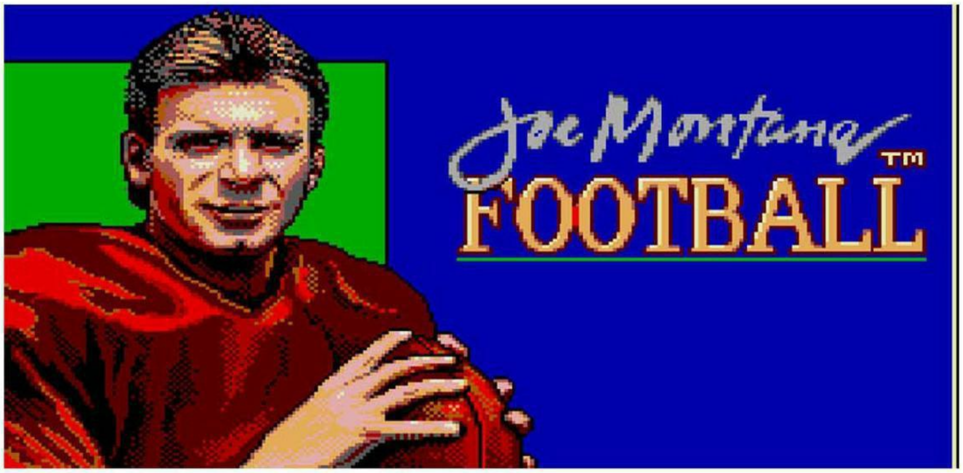


YOU HAVE 3 MORE POINTS FOR POWER UP!

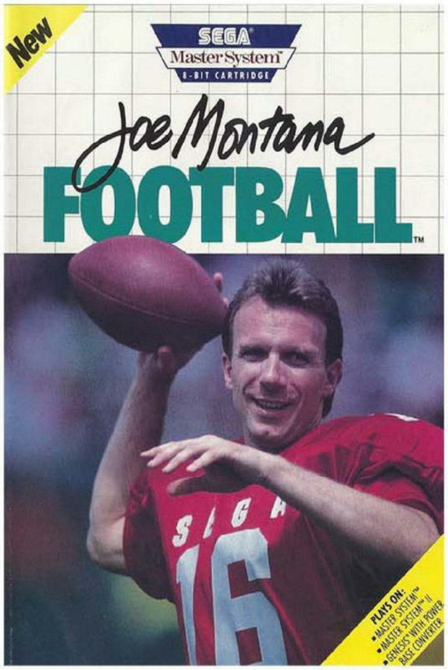
JOE MONTANA FOOTBALL

Release Date: 1990
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Sports - Football
Players: 1-2

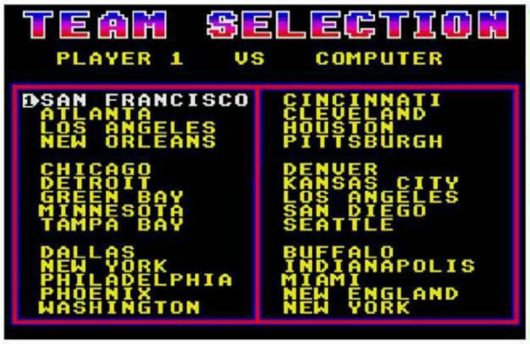

Joe Montana
FOOTBALL
TM

Joe Montana Football is a fairly decent, yet bare bones, football game.


New
SEGA
Master System
8-BIT CARTRIDGE
Joe Montana
FOOTBALL
TM
SEGA
16
PLAYS ON:
MASTER SYSTEM
MASTER SYSTEM II
GENESIS WITH POWER BASE CONVERTER

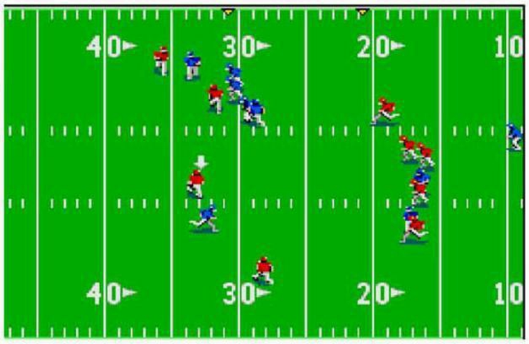
After picking from one of three difficulty levels you get to pick from twenty-eight semi real NFL teams. I say semi-real because the NFL cities are all there, but there are no logos or team names, let alone players. It really doesn't matter what team you pick as it doesn't seem to have an impact on gameplay in any noticeable way. Once you have your team you go to the coin flip and then kickoff.

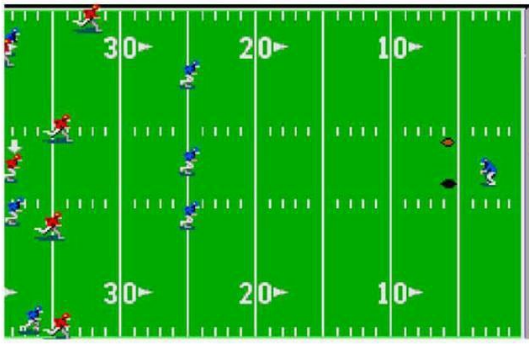
The game itself is pretty solid. The side scrolling action is a little slow, but it is nicely animated and doesn't feel overly sluggish. You have a wide variety of offensive plays to pick from, although you are extremely limited when it comes to defense (there are roughly three times as many offensive plays). The passing system is nice as it is very easy to switch between receivers (just a simple button press), and if you are on the run and throw a pass to a cross field receiver they will break their route and come back to the ball which is a nice touch. The running game is a bit iffy as you have to time a button press to pitch or hand the ball off.

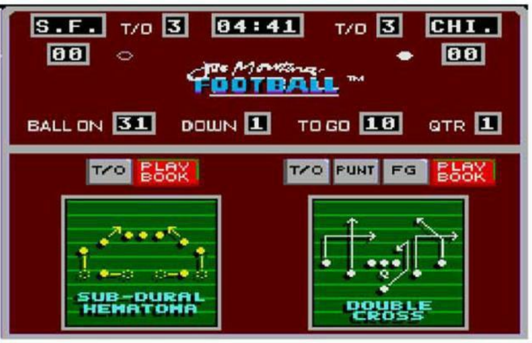

TEAM SELECTION

PLAYER 1 VS COMPUTER

▶SAN FRANCISCO	CINCINNATI
ATLANTA	CLEVELAND
LOS ANGELES	HOUSTON
NEW ORLEANS	PITTSBURGH
CHICAGO	DENVER
DETROIT	KANSAS CITY
GREEN BAY	LOS ANGELES
MINNESOTA	SAN DIEGO
TAMPA BAY	SEATTLE
DALLAS	BUFFALO
NEW YORK	INDIANAPOLIS
PHILADELPHIA	MIAMI
PHOENIX	NEW ENGLAND
WASHINGTON	NEW YORK






S.F. T/O 3 04:41 T/O 3 CHI.

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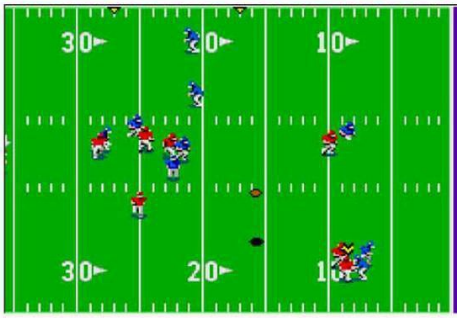
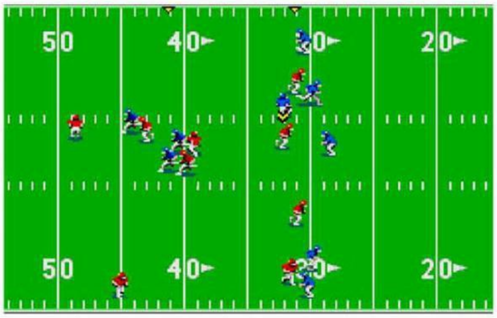
BALL ON 31 DOWN 1 TO GO 10 QTR 1

SUB-DURAL HEMATOMA

DOUBLE CROSS

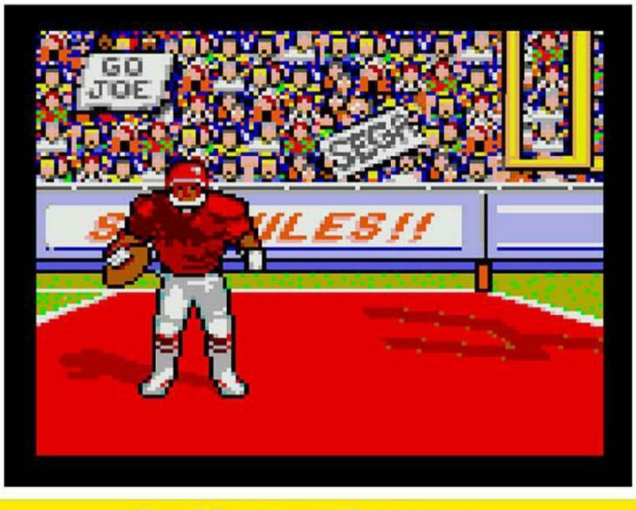




Defense is fairly easy to play. Before the play you have an ample amount of time to select the player you want to control, and unlike most football games you can trigger the computers snap rather than waiting around for them to decide to start the play. It's a nice little touch that speeds the game up a bit.

The kicking game is handled by the computer, so no power meters or lining up kicks, which is both good and bad. It's nice to know that you are always going to have the best possible kick, but it does take a little bit of the challenge out of it. The only other real thing of note is when you score a touchdown you are presented with a nifty little celebration animation with your player doing a little dance.

The biggest problem with the game is that it's one and done. There is no season or tournament mode, so the entire game feels like you are trapped in the preseason. While it's not a game killer, it would have been nice to have something other than a single game option. That limitation aside, this is one of the better football options on the Master System.

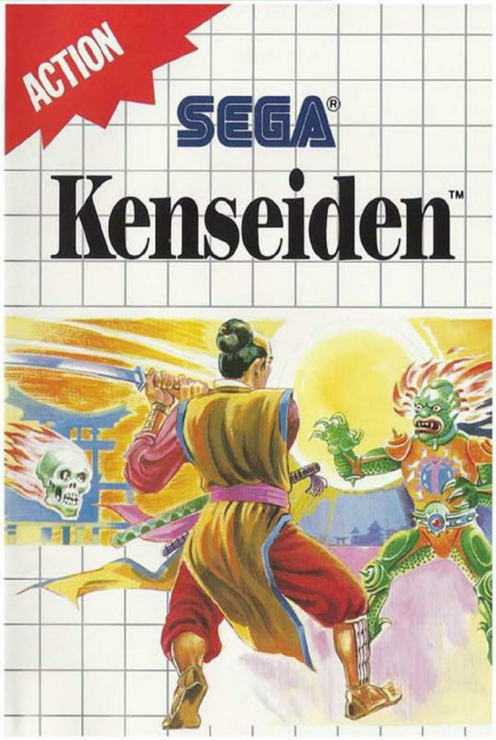


KENSEIDEN

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1

剣聖伝
KENSEIDEN
PUSH START BUTTON
©SEGA 1988

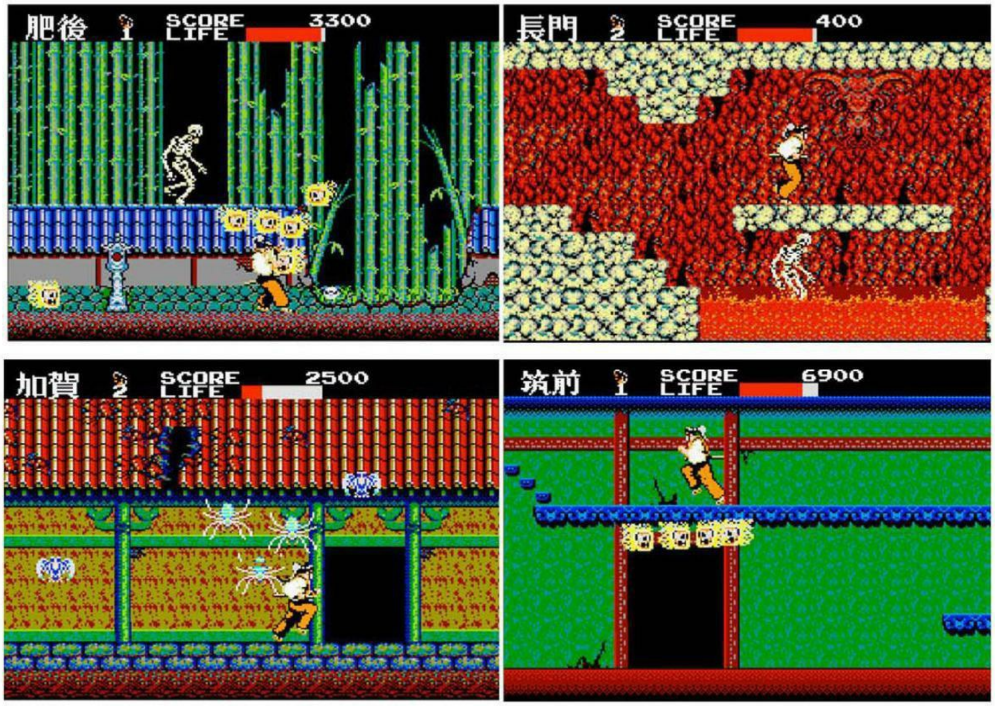

ACTION
SEGA®
Kenseiden™

Kenseiden is a hardcore arcade style action game that lets you romp across ancient Japan as a samurai.

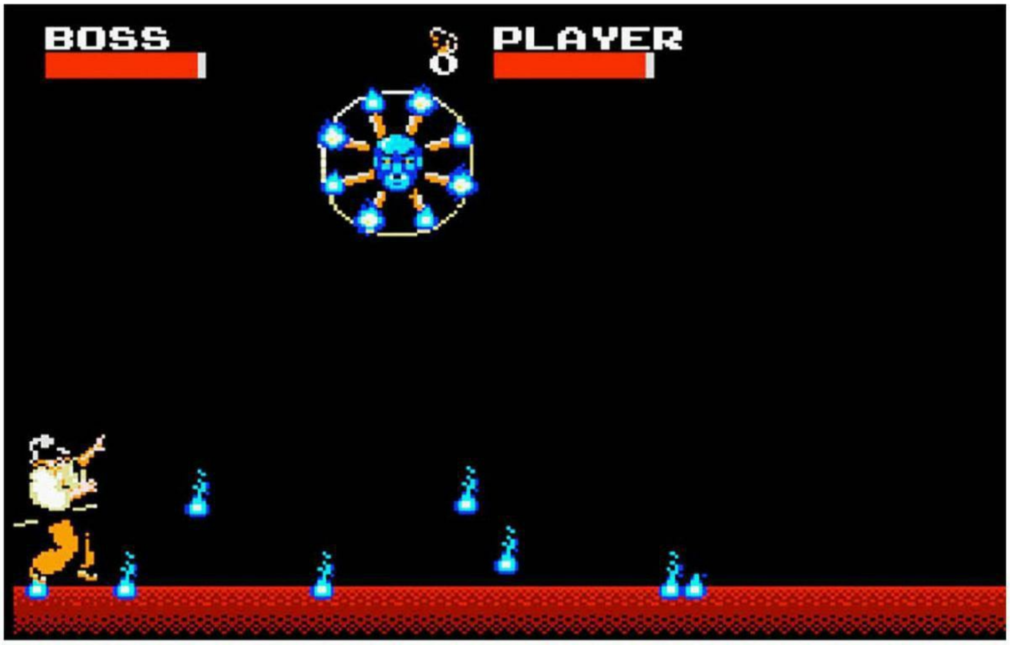
The story is pretty standard for this genre. You must journey across sixteen enemy filled levels to retrieve the Sword of the Dragon King and five sacred scrolls from a group of evil warlocks. Over the course of the game you'll come across three types of levels, standard, boss, and training.

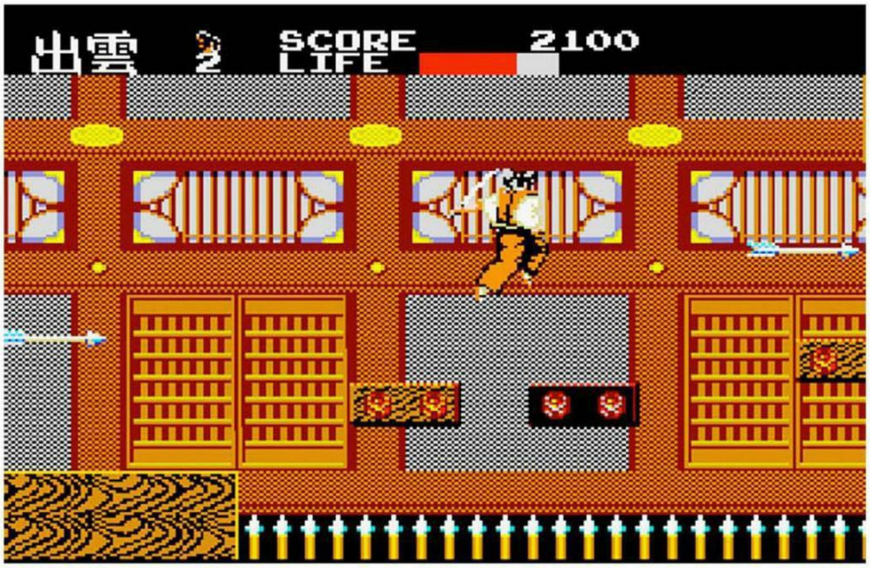
The standard levels are, well, standard. You go from left to right across towns and caves hacking and slashing anything that gets in your way until you reach the end. These stages are straightforward and are little more than filler levels to kill time between the boss levels.

The boss levels are a little more challenging in that you have to climb to the top of a demon infested temple before a duel to the death with a warlock. While the path to the top is a straight shot, you do have to venture outside and make some difficult jumps over bottomless pits in order to continue. This is a problem because your samurai is one of the worst jumpers in video game history, so expect to watch your highly trained warrior fall to his death over and over again, even when there is only a three foot jump to the other side. Assuming you can successfully navigate the temple pitfalls your reward is a nearly impossible boss fight. Congratulations?



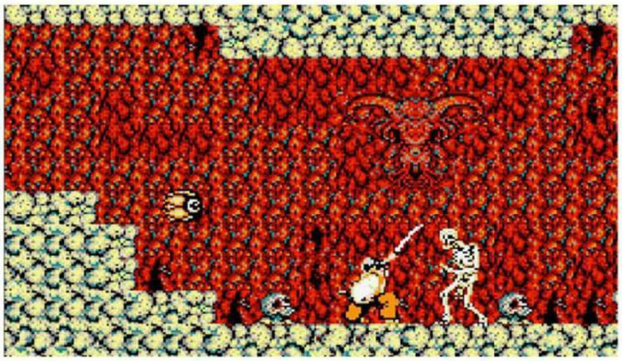
To put it mildly the battles with the warlocks are some of the most difficult you'll ever find. Take the first warlock for example. When the battle begins a giant flying fire wheel emerges and starts moving all around the screen while randomly throwing out half a dozen fireballs that can only be dodged if you happen to be on the opposite side of the screen when they land. This wouldn't be a huge deal if it wasn't for the fact that the warlock spends most of the battle at the top of the screen, which sadly is way out of your reach. The only time you get an opportunity to hit him is when he works his way down to the ground which in itself is problematic since he can not only hurt you with fireballs but by simply running into you (which is inevitable since he is rather large and you don't posses the jumping ability to make it over him). The only way to win this fight is to get incredibly lucky and hope that when he lobs the fireballs from above he is as far away from you as he can get, and you have to hope you can land enough blows with your sword to take him out before he takes you out. Thanks to him always ramming into you the battle usually comes down to who can land the killing blow first. If you happen to emerge victorious you are rewarded with a powerup scroll that grants you everything from powered up attacks to more health to higher jumping.





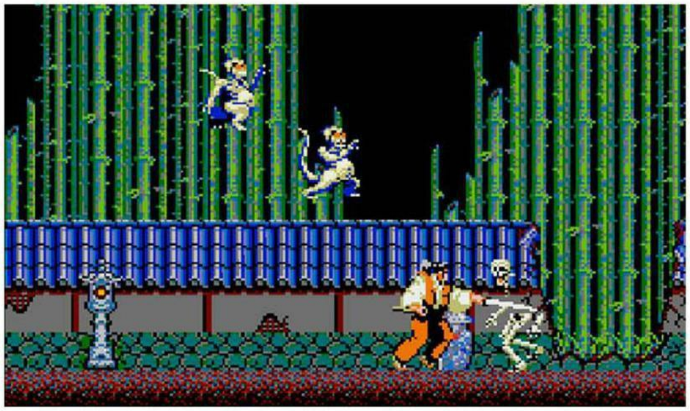
The final level type is a training stage, which thankfully are optional. If you thought the boss fights were impossible, just wait until you try these. Basically you have to make it to the end of a trap filled house in order to get a health boost. The problem is that there are spikes, moving platforms, and an ungodly number of arrows that are being shot at you from all directions. Since all it takes is one hit to send you all the way back to the start, get ready for an ample amount of frustration. Honestly the only way to make it through these levels is to play them over and over and over and memorize when and where the arrows come out (or by playing the game on an emulator and taking advantage of the save state feature). If you are playing the game without computer assistance chances are you'll give up after your twentieth attempt ends fifteen seconds after beginning thanks to an arrow that appeared six inches from your face.

The training levels shine a spotlight on the games biggest problem, the size and speed of your samurai. In a game that requires cat like reflexes the samurai is both way too slow to dodge most things and way too big to duck under them. If that wasn't bad enough the problem is compounded by the fact that when you get hit the enemies hover inside you while you recover. This not only prevents you from killing the enemy that just hit you but also means you get hit again as soon you lose your temporary invincibility. If you aren't careful your health bar will be reduced to virtually nothing in no time flat.



Speaking of enemies, there is a surprisingly wide variety of them. You have your flaming skulls that attack in groups, giant spiders that drop from the ceiling, and evil red eyed monkeys that aren't that hard to kill but are quite creepy. There are also ninjas, swordsmen, and skeletons who rise from the grave to get in your way. The biggest issue with the enemies is that they respawn way, way too quickly. For example, when you start on one of the temple stages you have to kill two waves of flaming skulls on your way to the staircase to the platform above. Even though the spawn point for the enemies you just killed was offscreen for two seconds the enemies come at you again. This is true for every single enemy in the game, which means every time you backtrack in the slightest you are going to be greeted with something to kill (and by something that wants to kill you).

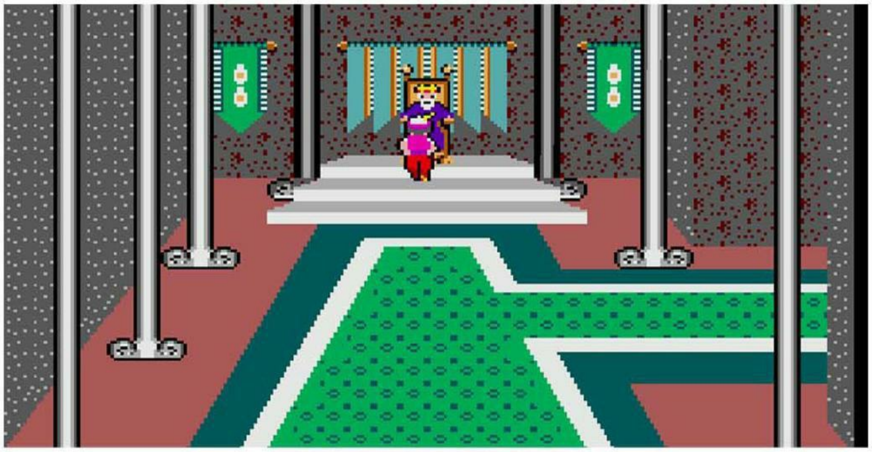
Even though Kenseiden has an incredibly high difficulty level as well as some flaws, it is still a very solid 8-Bit action title. Not only that, but in an era plagued with simple arcade ports that took ten minutes to play through, there is a lot of gameplay to be found here. If you have patience and don't mind a heck of a challenge, Kenseiden is worth a look.



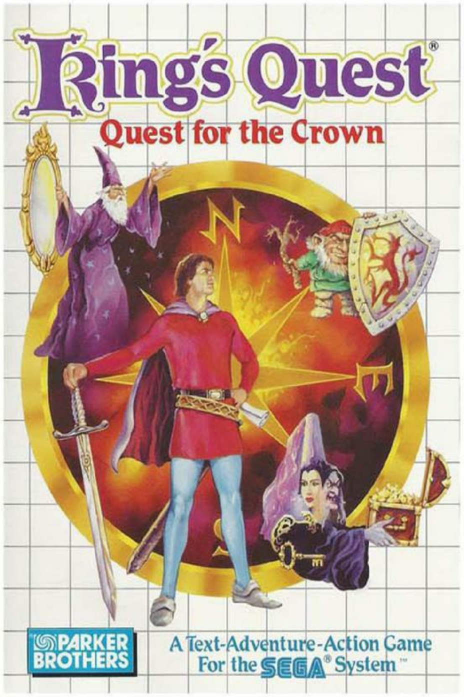
KING'S QUEST

Release Date: 1989
Developer: Parker Brothers
Publisher: Parker Brothers

Genre: Adventure
Players: 1

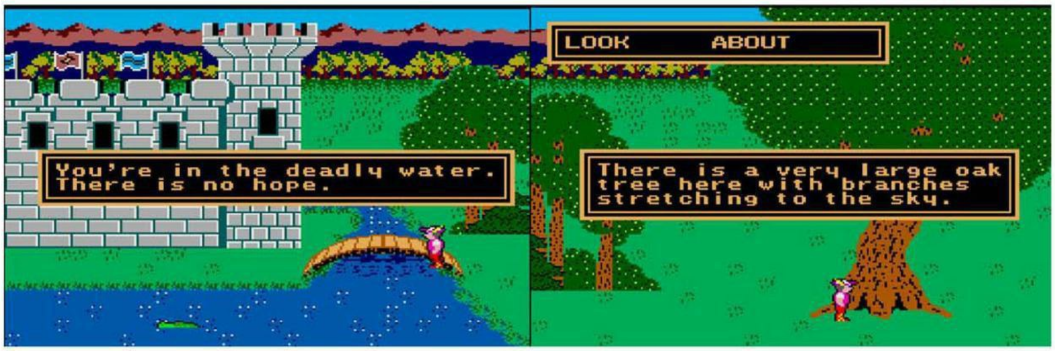


Kings Quest is a port of the very popular and influential Sierra PC adventure game.

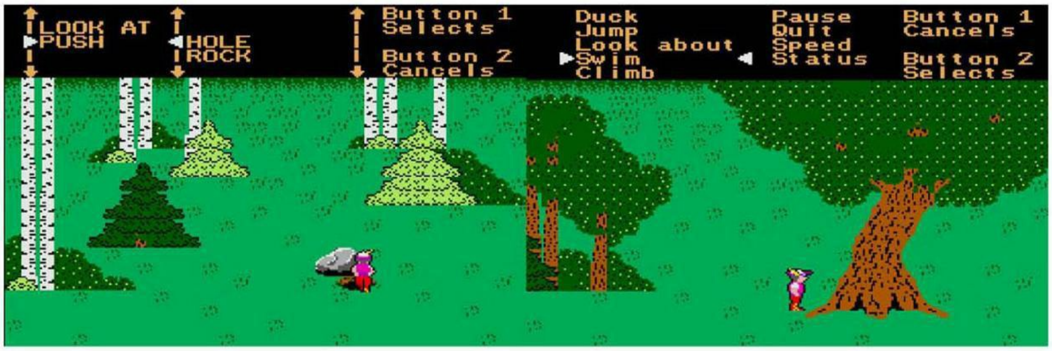

King's Quest
Quest for the Crown
PARKER BROTHERS
A Text-Adventure-Action Game
For the SEGA System

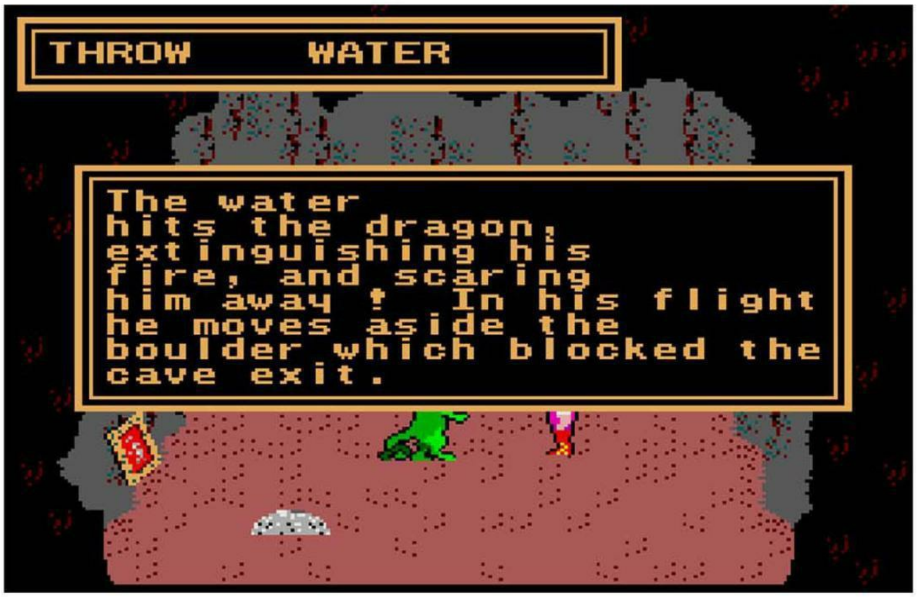
The story is quite simple, you are a young lad who is sent on a quest by the sick and dying King (hence the title) to find a trio of magical items that will prove your worthiness to the throne. Scattered across the land are a magic shield, a magic mirror, and a magic chest of gold (which has to be so much more awesome than a regular chest of gold, right?). Finding and acquiring these items is going to be much tougher than it should be however, thanks to the usual assortment of adventure game quirkiness.

The gameplay is essentially point and click, except that you have total control over your characters movements. This is both a good thing and a bad thing. While it is nice to be able to move wherever you want without having to click a cursor icon, it is frustrating since the various screens aren't that well designed when it comes to the things that can kill you. For example, on the very first screen you can die within about three seconds as you try to cross the bridge. If you aren't lined up perfectly (and by perfectly I mean nowhere near where you think you should be) you will walk right off the bridge and into the alligator filled moat.


You're in the deadly water. There is no hope.

There is a very large oak tree here with branches stretching to the sky.


LOOK AT
▶PUSH
◀HOLE
ROCK
Button 1 Selects
Button 2 Cancels
Duck
Jump
Look about
▶Swim ◀
Climb
Pause
Quit
Speed
Status
Button 1 Cancels
Button 2 Selects

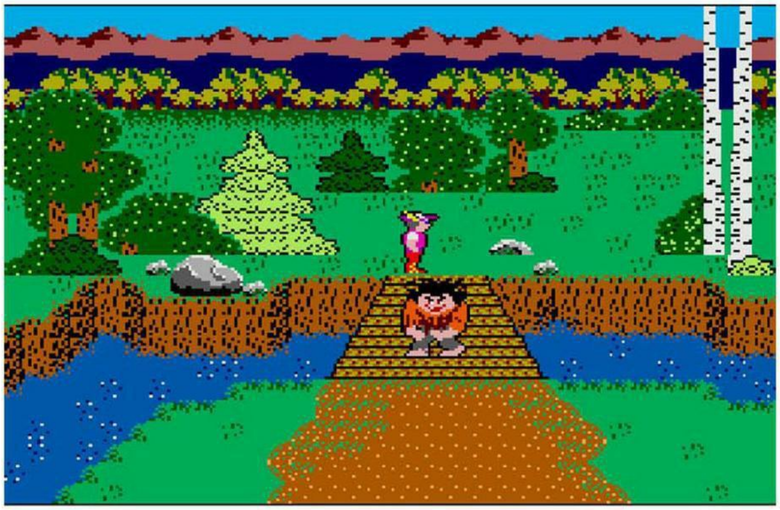


THROW WATER

The water hits the dragon, extinguishing his fire, and scaring him away ! In his flight he moves aside the boulder which blocked the cave exit.

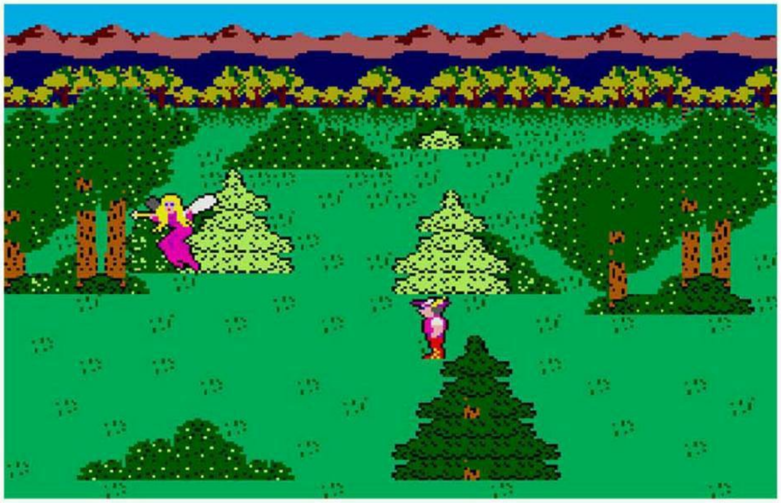
You should expect this to happen quite a bit since just about every single thing can kill you, no matter how trivial. Fall in the water? Death. Fall six inches to the ground while climbing a tree? Death. Fall into a hole in the floor? Death. Fall in a…well, you get the idea. This wouldn't be that bad if you could simply hit start and pick up where you died, but that would be too easy. Oh no, if you die and hit start you will be right back at the beginning of the game, empty handed. There is a password system here, but it requires you to enter in an obscenely long password. Chances are in the early going it would take you less time to just repeat the steps you did to catch back up.

Besides dying a lot, there are other things to do in the game. There is a fairly robust world (for an 8-Bit title) to explore that is filled with trolls, fairy godmothers, and fire breathing dragons just to name a few. There are also a ton of items you can get like daggers, golden eggs, and buckets. Despite their seemingly randomness, each and every one of the items plays an important role in your journey. Some are obvious like filling the bucket with water and throwing it on the dragon to extinguish its fire and scare it off. Others are kind of out of left field, like playing a fiddle to cause a bunch of leprechauns to leave you alone. Also, unless you have an FAQ giving you step by step instructions, expect to do a lot of trial and error before you make too much progress.



The biggest drawback to this port is that the Master System is lacking a keyboard, which is something the original PC version used a great deal. Thankfully there is a decent system that uses a series of pre-generated text menus to create all the necessary in game prompts, such as "open door" and "get dagger". There are tons of commands, like "look", "get", "fill", "climb", etc, and the system is pretty easy to use. While it does take away a bit from the authenticity, but it doesn't kill the game once you get used to it.

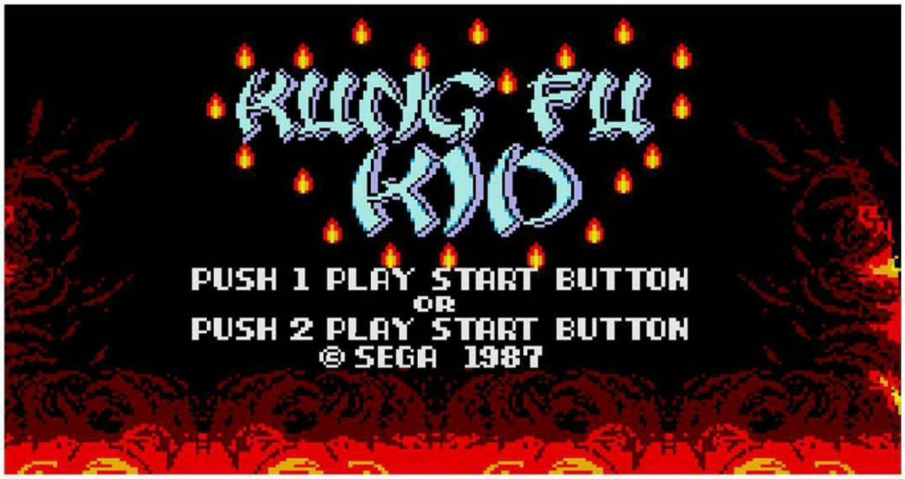
If you are looking for an adventure game on the Master System, this is going to be your best bet, mainly because it is pretty much the only true adventure title in the library.



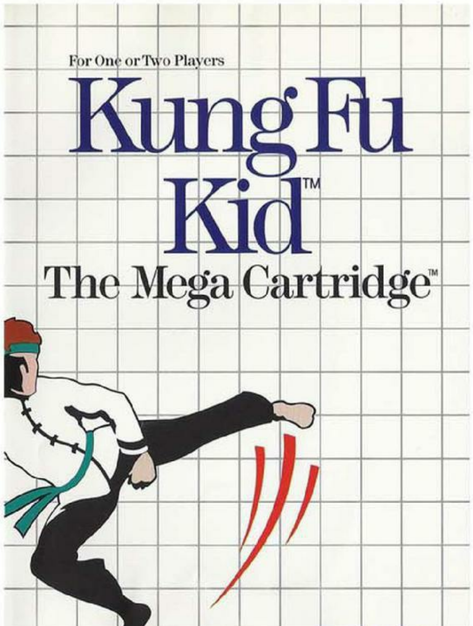
KUNG FU KID

Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

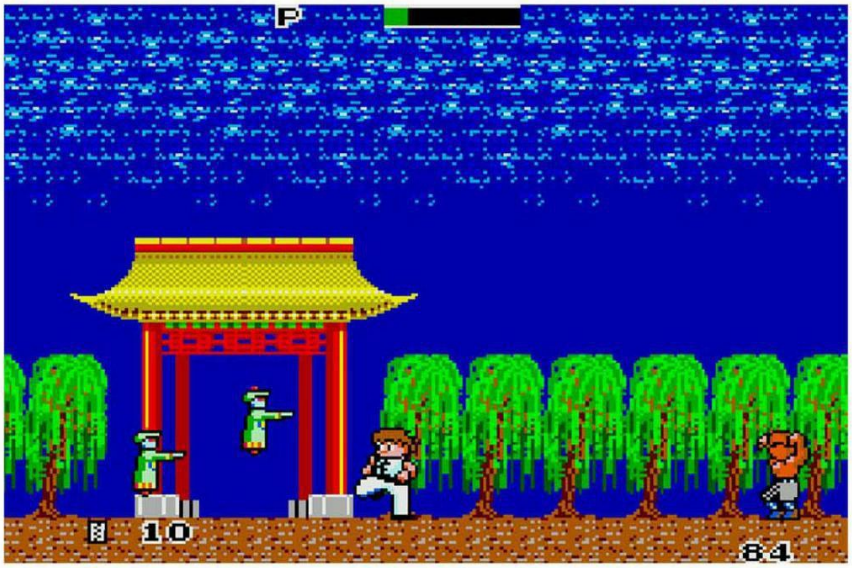
Genre: Arcade - Action
Players: 1-2



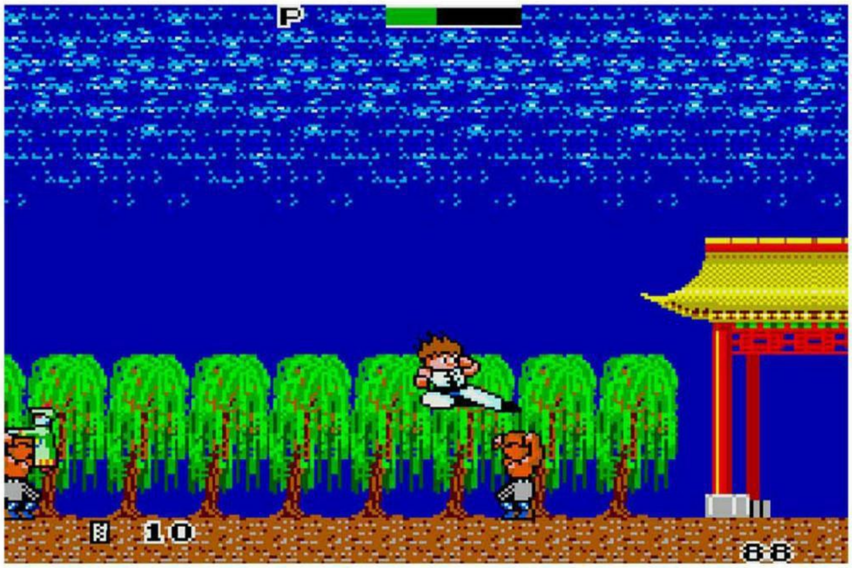
PUSH 1 PLAY START BUTTON
OR
PUSH 2 PLAY START BUTTON
© SEGA 1987


For One or Two Players
Kung Fu Kid™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

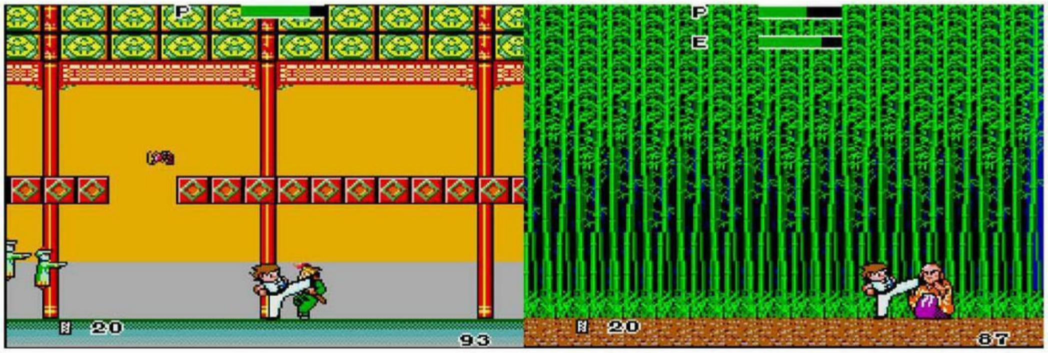
This side scrolling action game features seven poorly designed levels of pain and frustration.

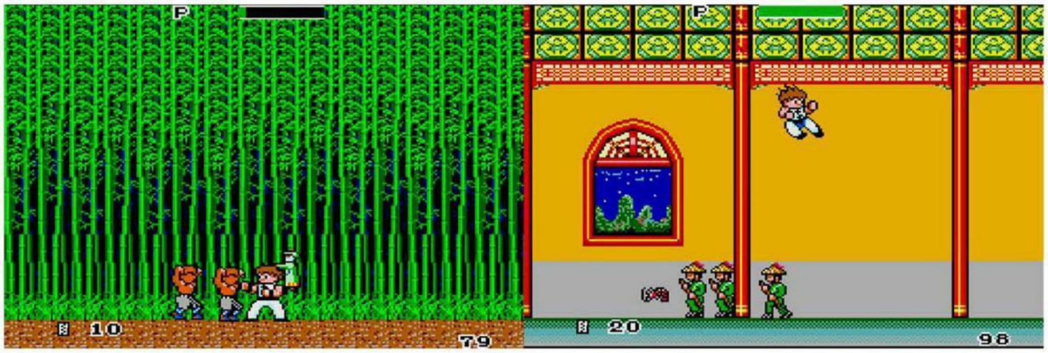


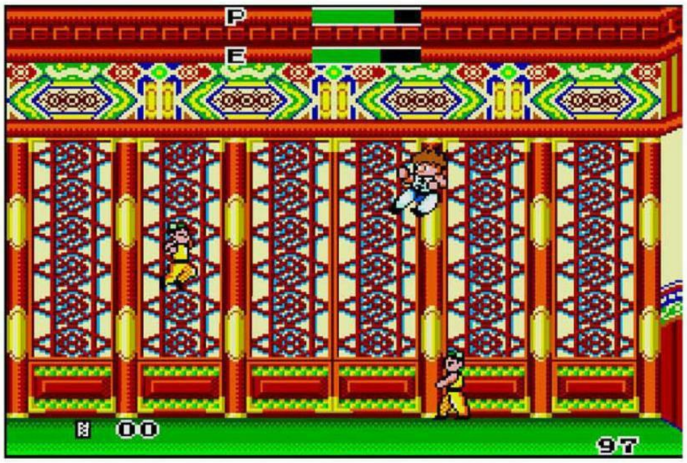
You are the Kung Fu Kid, who is on a quest to kick every living thing in the face. The first thing you'll notice when you take control of the Kid is that he walks like he is wearing cement shoes. Seriously, he is the slowest walking character in the game. How slow? If he were part of the elderly group that walks around the mall people with walkers would be asking for him to pick up the pace. This all changes however when he jumps, as he can practically leap to the highest point on the screen. In light of this revelation you will be jumping through the level rather than walking it.



The levels are incredibly short but have a fair amount of things for you to kick. There are the standard guys that run directly at you as well as the flying/jumping creatures. One of the more interesting enemies is what looks like a frog, that when kicked will slowly fly off screen killing everything in its path. Everything else you kick will fly back a few feet and disintegrates. Of course rather than standing your ground and fighting the enemies as they come at you from both sides it is much easier to jump over everything until you get to the boss, then turn and rapidly kick everything in the level in the face. Sometimes though the game doesn't quite know what to do with this strategy, so the normal enemies will become stuck at the edge of the boss screen which allows you to get really close and knock them all out without breaking a sweat.

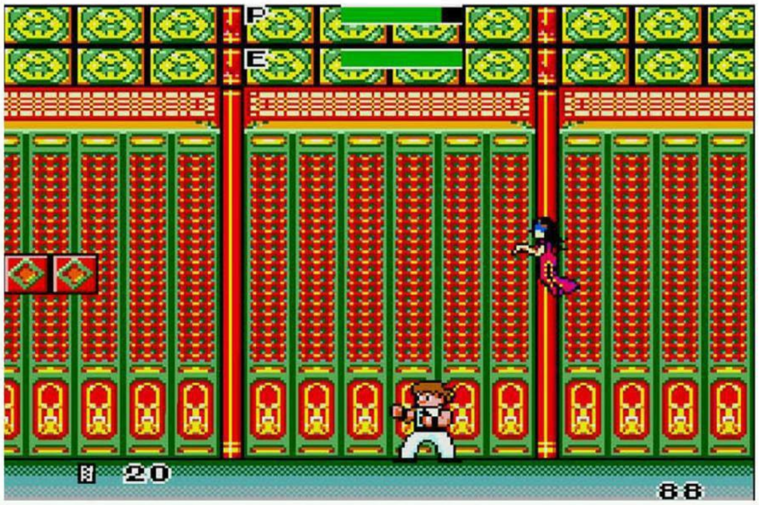






There are bosses at the end of each level which vary wildly when it comes to difficulty. The first boss is a fat guy in a robe that occasionally takes a kick at you and can be defeated just by holding your ground. While the second level boss fight has you facing off against a variety of flying geisha ghosts that can be infuriating at times even though they fly in the exact same pattern. Oh, and be careful during these fights because if you die you get to start over at the very beginning of the level and do it all over again. Even though the levels are short, it is frustrating nonetheless.

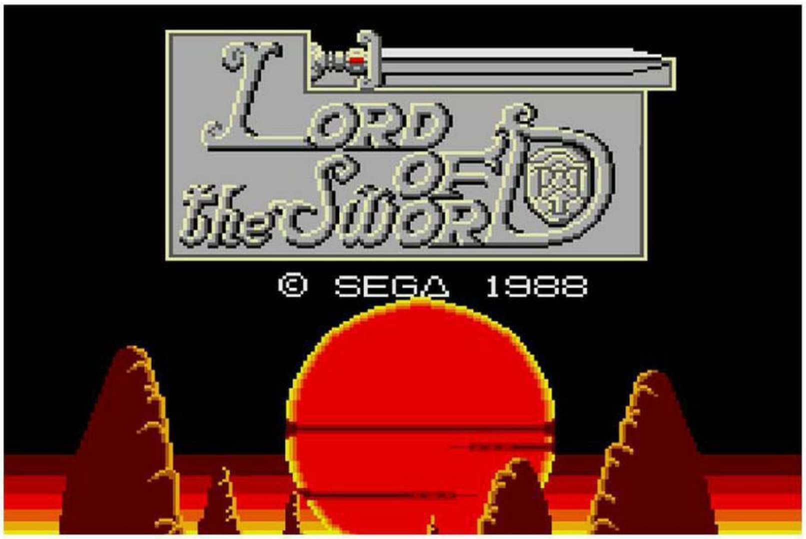
Sadly there's not much more going on here. If you have ten to fifteen minutes to kill and have an overwhelming desire to kick stuff in the face and use an amphibian as a projectile weapon, it's worth checking out. If you want a deep well designed arcade action game, check elsewhere.



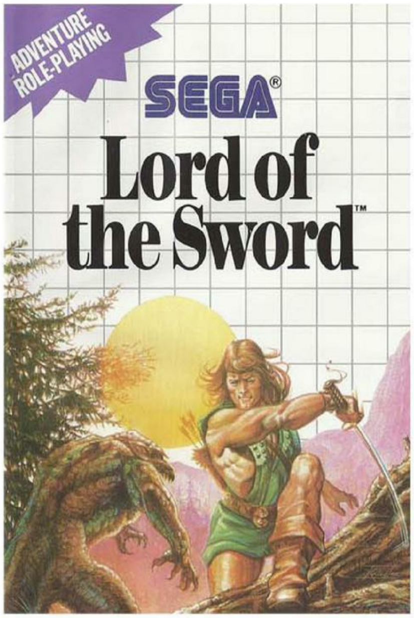
LORD OF THE SWORD

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1

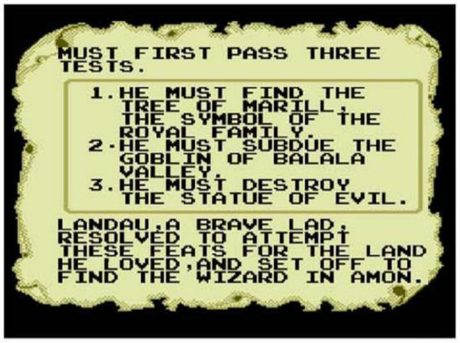

Lord of the Sword
© SEGA 1988

Lord of the Sword is an ambitious non-linear(ish) action game that falls way short of what it was aiming for.


ADVENTURE
ROLE-PLAYING
SEGA®
Lord of the Sword™

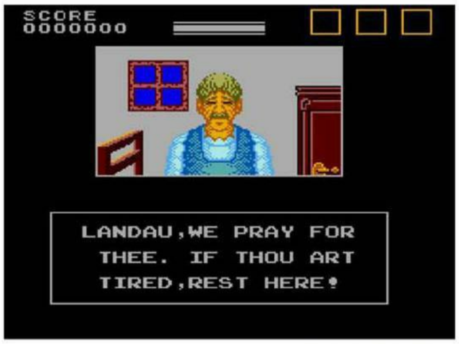
You are Landau, a swordsman who must set out on a quest to prove his worthiness before he can assume the throne. He is given three simple tasks. Find the Tree of Merill, kill the goblin of the Balala Valley, and to destroy the Statue of Evil. While this sounds easy enough it is very far from it.

Landau has two attacks at his disposal, his sword and his bow. Since the game is called "Lord of the Sword" it's no surprise that he is quite handy with the blade and is able to carve up just about anything that gets in his path. The sword is quick and deadly, and has the ability to freeze an enemy long enough for you to swing again before they have a chance to move. While this makes sense on the smaller enemies who may only take two to three hits, it can also be employed on bosses, which takes a lot of the challenge out of fighting them. While the sword is devastating, the bow is the polar opposite in just about every single way. For starters it is incredibly slow for you to draw and fire, so more often than not if you have an enemy bearing down on you they will be in your lap before you have a chance to fire. This isn't that big of a deal since your sword can take out anything that comes your way, but the fact that you have a button for the bow does deal your character a major setback in that you have to hit up in order to jump. It can be a little annoying to be in a sword fight only to accidentally hit up and leap into the air rather than landing a blow.

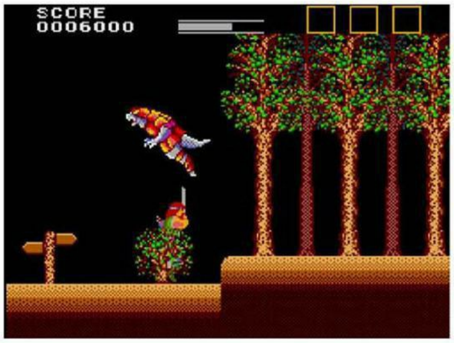

MUST FIRST PASS THREE TESTS.

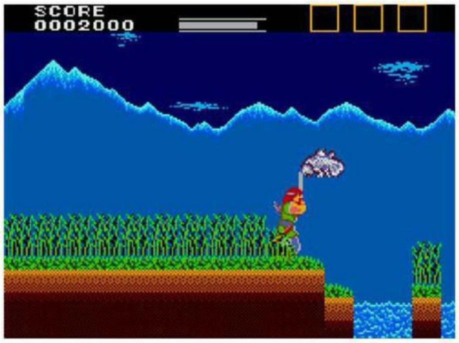
1. HE MUST FIND THE TREE OF MARILL, THE SYMBOL OF THE ROYAL FAMILY.
2. HE MUST SUBDUE THE GOBLIN OF BALALA VALLEY.
3. HE MUST DESTROY THE STATUE OF EVIL.

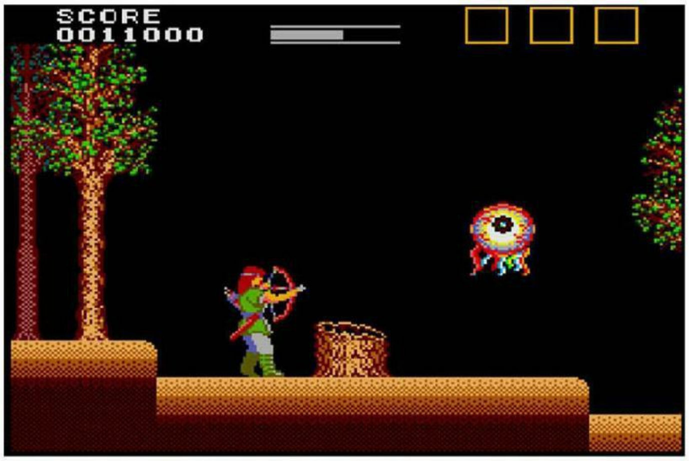
LANDAU,A BRAVE LAD, RESOLVED TO ATTEMPT THESE FEATS FOR THE LAND HE LOVED,AND SET OFF TO FIND THE WIZARD IN AMON.



LANDAU,WE PRAY FOR THEE. IF THOU ART TIRED,REST HERE!





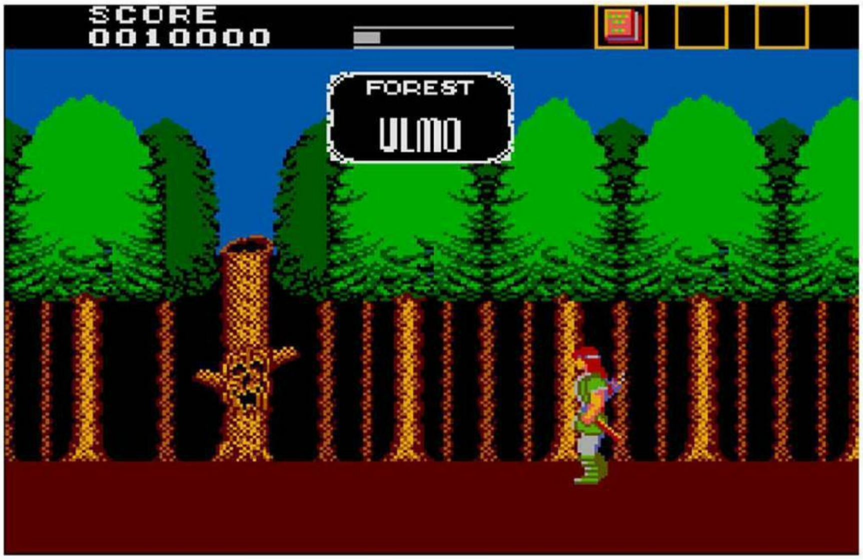


The enemies you encounter are plentiful and varied. Like just about every game from this era, there are small woodland creatures that will dive-bomb you and make your life miserable. There are also a wide variety of swordsmen, ranging from the standard "run directly at you and attack" type to the "jumping skeleton" types, to some that look like they are armored wild animals. In addition to those you will also have to fight winged devils, floating eyeballs, snakes, and many others. Most of the enemies you face will lock on and come straight at you, so outside of what they look like they are essentially the same. There are a number of boss fights to be had with the likes of Medusa, a giant, and an evil tree (seriously), but triggering those can be difficult.

While the game appears to be non-linear since virtually the entire game world is open to you at the very beginning, it must be completed in sequence. Now usually in games like this (i.e. Legend of Zelda, Metroid, etc) you gain new items that open up new pathways, and it's somewhat obvious as to what direction you should be going in. Here however the only directions you get are from the occasional chat with a shopkeep that will tell you "go to xxxx", which would be fine if there was a map or some way to read the road signs that dot the landscape. Instead the only way for these little tidbits to help is if you have painstakingly drawn a map over the course of your play through (or if you cheat and look it up online, which wasn't an option back in 1988). Now you can access a map by pressing pause while you are in a village, but it gives you no indication of where you are, nor how you got there, so it does very little good. If you have the instruction manual there is a map in there which is somewhat helpful since it shows location names and routes, although it would have been nice to have access to that within the game itself.

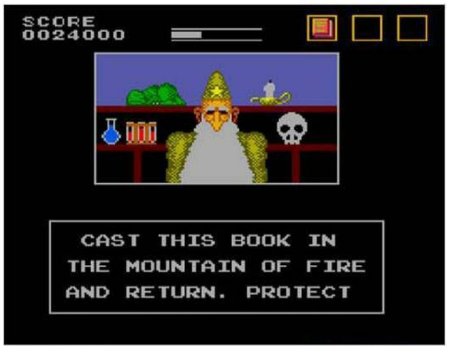
If getting lost was your only concern it wouldn't be a big deal since you could always wander around killing things until you achieve your goal. Unfortunately if you stumble upon a boss screen out of order if will be empty, which means you will have to not only backtrack in an attempt to find the boss you are supposed to be fighting, but you will ultimately have to return to this empty screen again at some point on your journey. This does drain a lot of the fun out of the game since unless you cheat or get very very lucky, you will be spending a lot of your time replaying the same levels over and over and over again until you do it in the correct order.

There are a few different level types that you will encounter, such as caves, forests, and bridges over water, but they all play out essentially the same way. You try to get from the left side to the right side (or vice versa) to move onto the next level where you try and do the same thing. If you happen to die on that particular portion of your quest, never fear since the game comes equipped with unlimited continues that will get you back into the fight at the entranceway you came in. While it's nice to have the ability to play through the entire game without fear of getting deep into it and exhausting your final continue, it does diminish the game a bit since the levels are so short. Because Landau is invincible for a few seconds after being hit and can walk through enemies, it's possible to just take a leisurely stroll through the stage without swinging your sword or drawing your bow. At least until you get to the bosses, assuming you can find them that is.

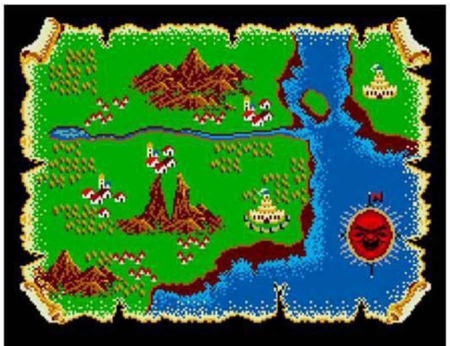


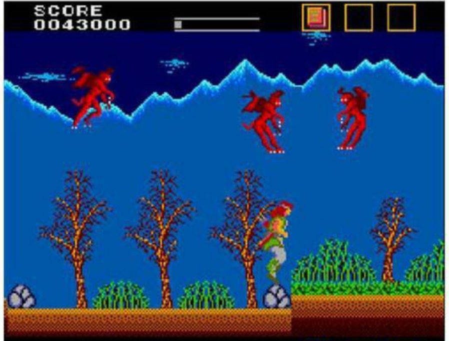
For the most part the only items you pick up are key items that trigger bosses or that are needed to complete the game. You will occasionally find weapon upgrades, but outside of their power you can't tell you have picked anything up as your weapons appear to stay the same. Enemies don't drop anything like money or health, so you really don't have any incentive to kill them. While it would have been nice to have some shops and some unique power ups, it's not a total game killer.

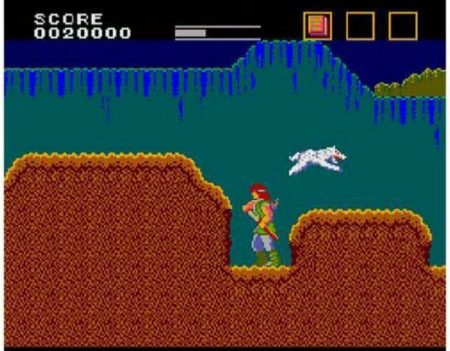
Lord of the Sword is a disappointment because it has so much wasted potential. A nonlinear action platformer where you face off against an army of evil creatures is a fantastic idea, but when you throw in all the broken elements (lack of useful map, lack of powerups, etc) it turns the game into an example of "what could have been" rather than a classic.

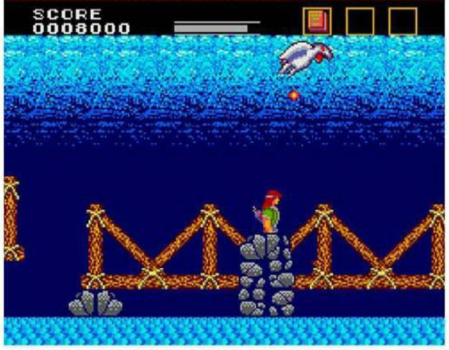


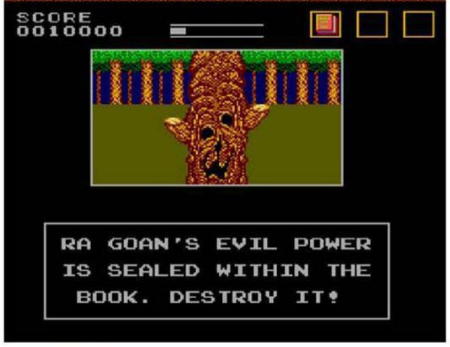
CAST THIS BOOK IN
THE MOUNTAIN OF FIRE
AND RETURN. PROTECT









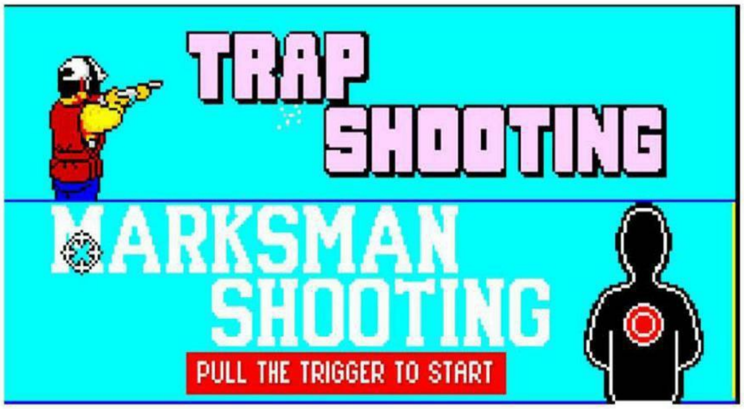


RA GOAN'S EVIL POWER
IS SEALED WITHIN THE
BOOK. DESTROY IT!

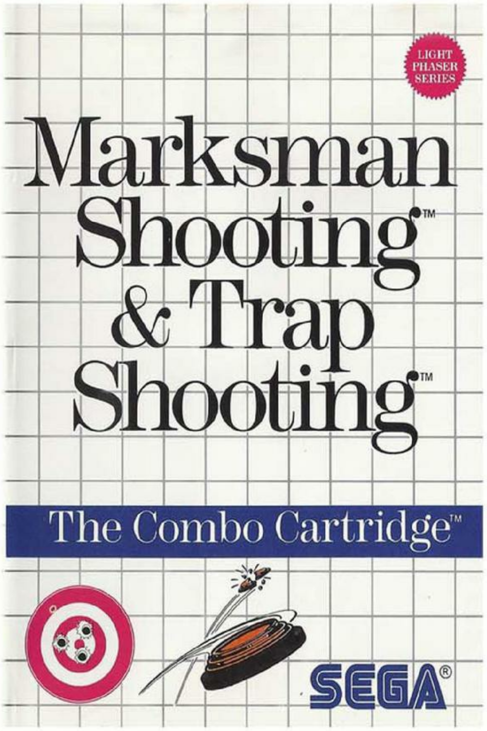
MARKSMAN/TRAP SHOOTING

Release Date: 1986
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Light Gun Shooting
Players: 1

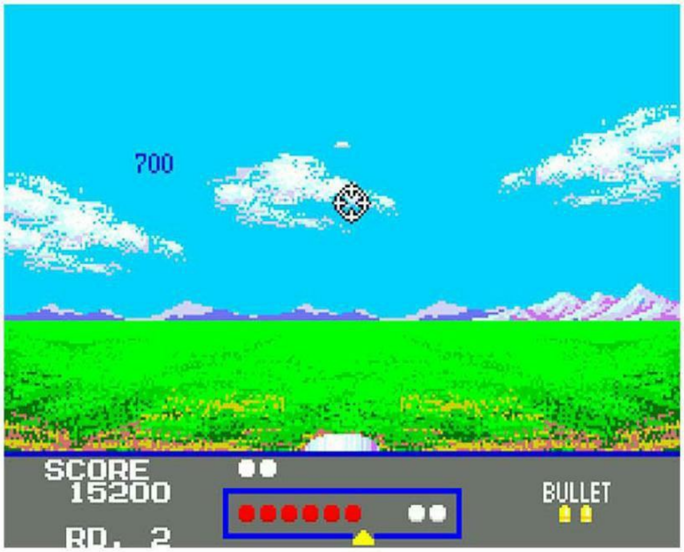

TRAP
SHOOTING
MARKSMAN
SHOOTING
PULL THE TRIGGER TO START

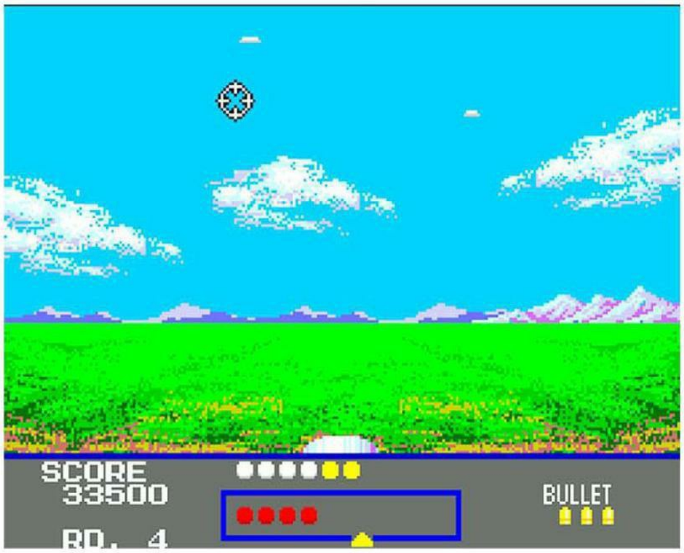
Marksman Shooting/Trap Shooting is simple shovelware that takes advantage of the Sega Light Gun.


LIGHT PHASER SERIES
Marksman Shooting™ & Trap Shooting™
The Combo Cartridge™
SEGA®

Both of these games are incredible simplistic and appear to have been tossed out into the marketplace for the sole reason of grabbing a few extra dollars from people who opened the light gun. These "games" are so shallow that they barely even qualify as mini-games, and it makes Duck Hunt look like a robust gaming experience.

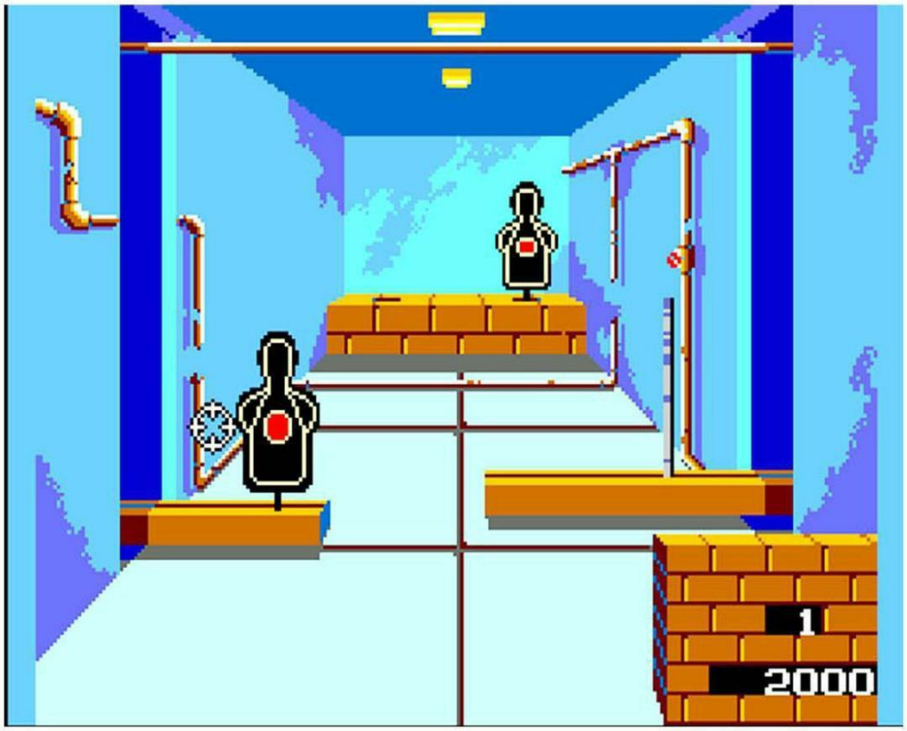
Trap Shooting is, well, trap shooting. You are on a range where the clay targets are fired off two at a time and you have three bullets to hit them. If you happen to hit more than you miss in each round, congratulations, you get another round. And, well, that's about it.





Marksman Shooting isn't much better as you are on a single range that has a handful of stationary and moving human cutout targets that will pop up. The goal in each round is to shoot a certain percentage of the targets, and if achieved you get to go on to the next round where there are more targets. You also have unlimited bullets and there doesn't seem to be a penalty for missing, so it really takes away from the whole "marksman" thing and turns it into a "gotta fill the screen with as much digital lead to hit as many of the targets as I can" thing. The only noticeable changes from round to round are the number of targets, the percentage you must hit to move on, and the speed with which the targets pop up, but even those are slight differences from round to round.

If you are looking for a simple title to help you hone in you light gun skills, this is certainly a way to go. If you are looking for something that will hold your interest for longer than five minutes, you should look elsewhere.

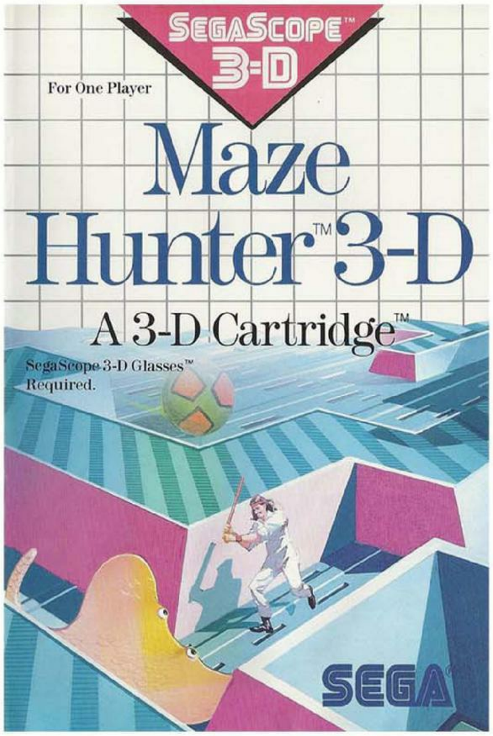


MAZE HUNTER 3-D

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1

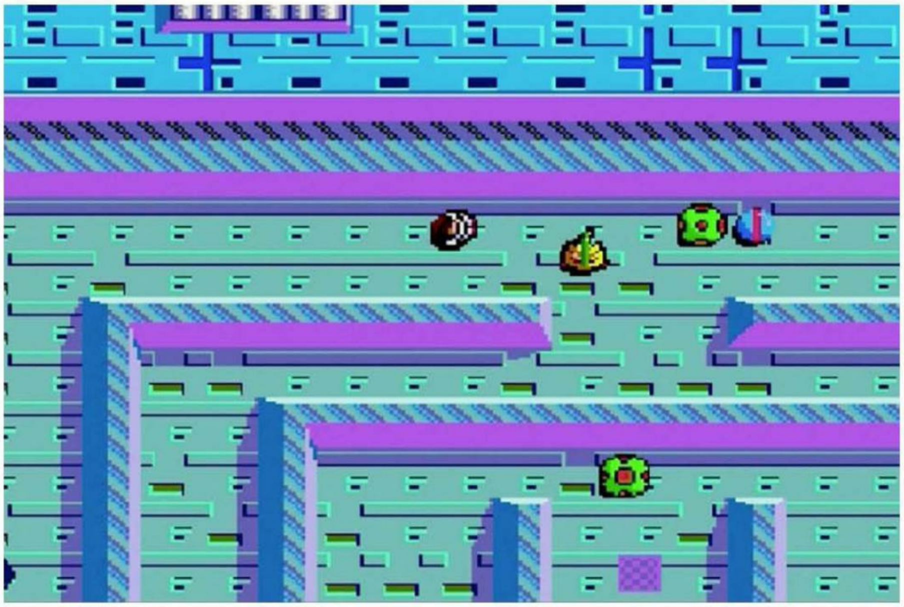
MAZE
HUNTER
3D

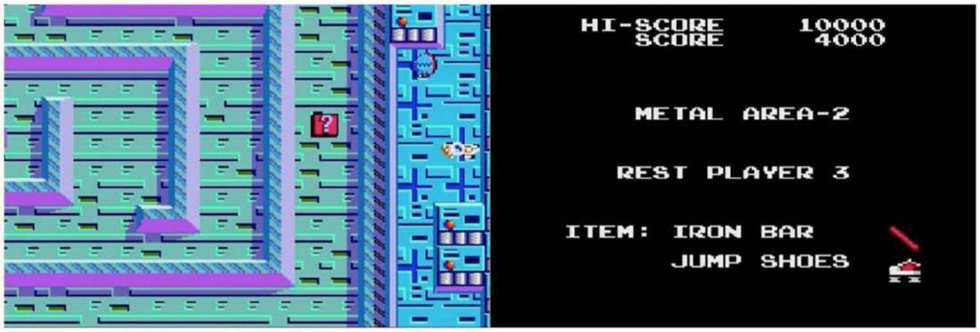

SEGASCOPE™
3-D
For One Player
Maze
Hunter™ 3-D
A 3-D Cartridge™
SegaScope 3-D Glasses™
Required.
SEGA

Despite being simplistic and straightforward, Maze Hunter 3-D is an effective use of the 3-D glasses.

You control a nameless protagonist who is trapped in a creature filled space maze and must escape at all costs. Normally this is where I would say "that's easier said than done", but the reality is it is quite easy to escape with nothing but the most basic of gaming skills. For starters the mazes are rudimentary at best. Seriously, the first level has a single pathway, and even the later levels have only one or two potential wrong turns. Even the final maze is rudimentary in its design. In your travels you will encounter a warp zone that will take you to a different portion of the maze, but even at the end of the game they are few and far between.

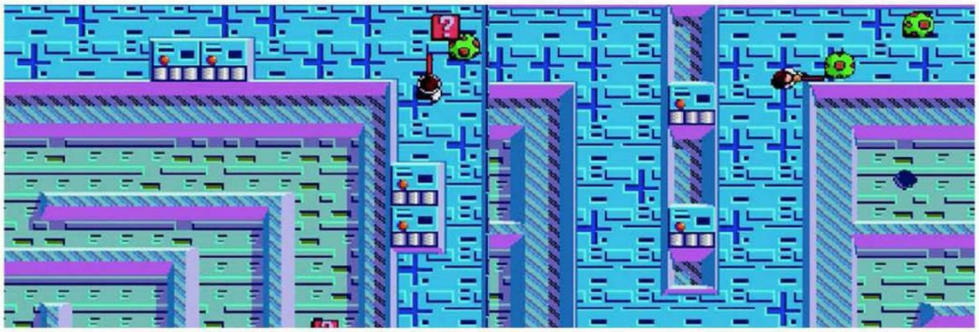
The enemies aren't anything to write home about either, as they are easily killed with the lead pipe you find at the beginning of the game. For the most part they move slowly and in predictable patterns. With patience they are easy to wipe out. That said, you are going to be in deep trouble if you happen to mistime a hit and the enemy gets the best of you. Upon death you lose your weapon (and any other powerups like the jump boosting shoes), which means you will be unarmed against the enemies. The only way to proceed from there is to leap over your enemies in spectacular 3-D, which is tricky. Well, it's tricky if you are forced to play without the 3-D glasses, which unless you have an original SMS setup with a working pair of glasses and and old school TV, you will be.




HI-SCORE 10000
SCORE 4000
METAL AREA-2
REST PLAYER 3
ITEM: IRON BAR
JUMP SHOES

Thee are a grand total of twenty levels, broken down into five themed worlds like Metal and Jungle. Nothing really changes from world to world outside of the background and the varieties of enemies. The core gameplay of wandering down hallways until you find the exit is intact throughout. Exciting, I know.

Even though the levels are straightforward and the fact the game makes you feel like you are so drunk you are seeing double, the game is playable without the 3-D glasses. Not exactly sure why you would want to since the blurred gameplay is sure to give you a raging migraine, but the option to do so is there.



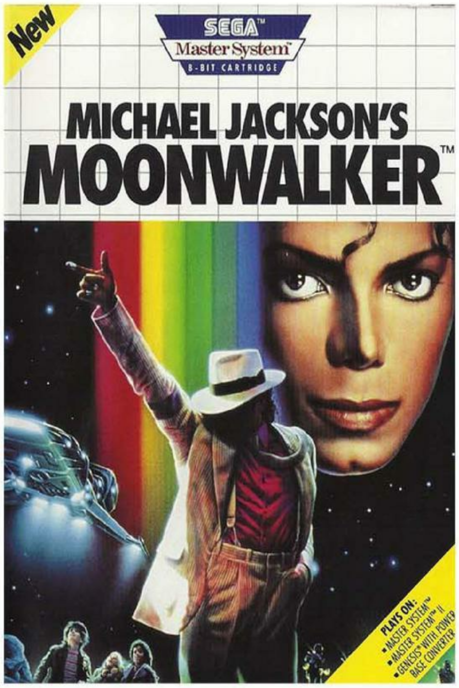
MICHAEL JACKSON'S MOONWALKER

Release Date: 1990
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1

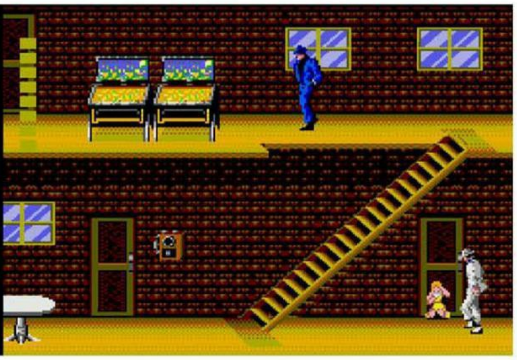
MICHAEL JACKSON's
MOONWALKER TM

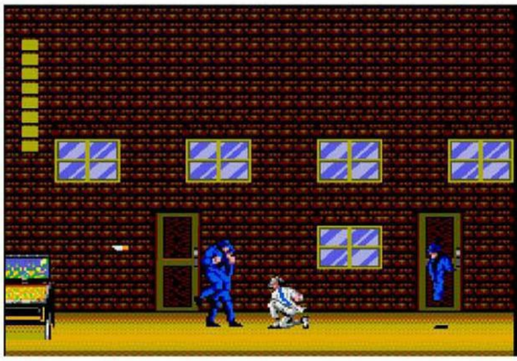
In what will forever be referred to as a much more innocent time, Michael Jackson is in his Smooth Criminal Outfit going from building to building searching through closets for lost kids.


New
SEGA
Master System
8-BIT CARTRIDGE
MICHAEL JACKSON'S
MOONWALKER
PLAYS ON:
MASTER SYSTEM
MASTER SYSTEM II
GENESIS WITH POWER BASE CONVERTER

The basic premise is simple, a bad guy has kidnapped a great number of children and hidden them throughout various nightclubs, parking garages, and graveyards, and it's your job to find them. The evil kidnapper isn't too creative when it comes to hiding them though, as instead of putting them in a secure bunker he has put them in closets, car trunks, and quite creepily behind grave stones. This sounds like an easy task until you realize that the buildings he hid them in had the worst interior designer ever as there are dozens up on dozens of doors. Once you rescue all the children on that level you are taken to a boss fight which usually consists of a stationary screen filled with normal enemies. Survive that fight you will strike a pose in celebration before moving on to the next level.

Michael is a surprisingly decent combatant. He has good range with his kick and punch, and when he gets in a pinch he can break out his awesome dance moves. By holding down the attack button Michael will spin and spin until breaking out into a dance solo, which when completed will clear the screen of enemies. The downside to this is that it takes up a few bars of health, so it must be used sparingly.

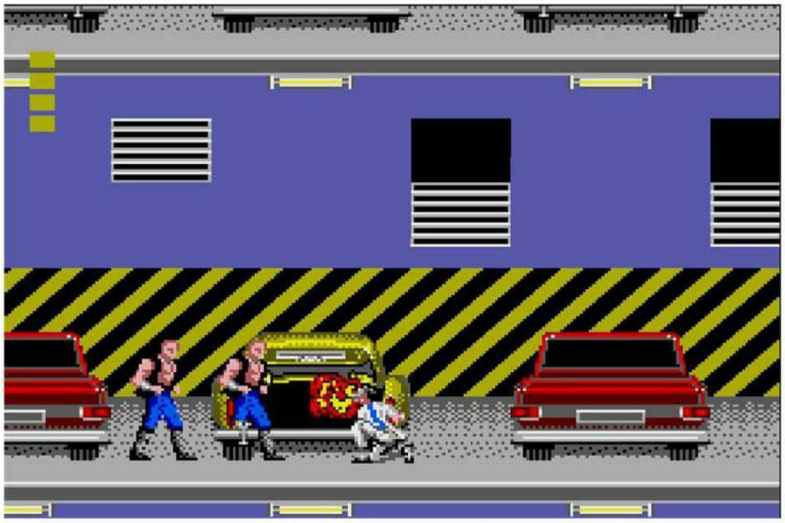




HAHA!
YOU'LL NEVER
CATCH ME!

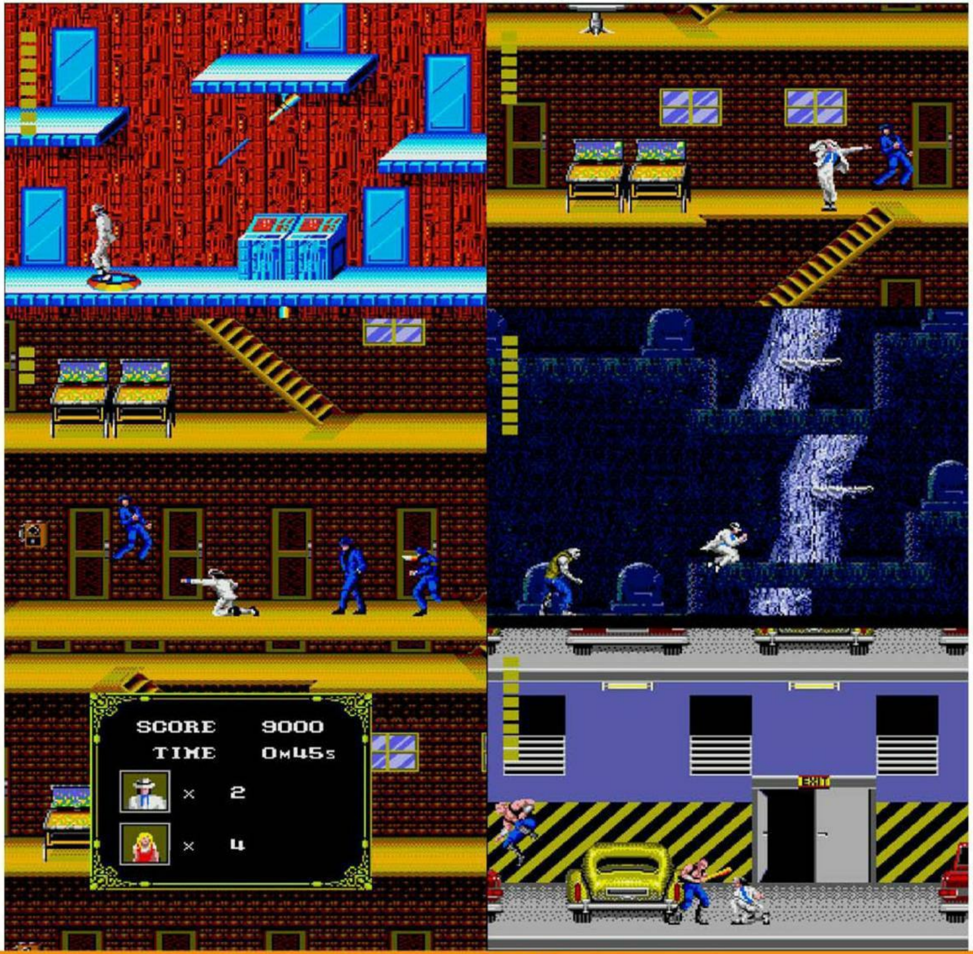
The biggest obstacle preventing you from rescuing the little tykes are the presence of gangsters, thugs, and even zombies. The worst of the bunch are the gangsters who unlike most generic villains found in video games actually do a bang up job beating the crap out of you. The first handful you run into will lull you into a false sense of security as they do little more than walk towards you. Shortly after dispatching them however their meaner counterparts show up, the knife throwing gangsters. These fine gentlemen have a tendency to randomly pop out of doors and throw a knife at you before you have a chance to react. But even they are easy going compared to the gun toting gangsters. These guys jump out of doorways with guns a blazing, and will shoot you in the face before the door has even closed. To make them even more frustrating, they rarely stop firing, which means if you are a good distance away from them you will either have to inch your way up while constantly ducking under bullets, or make a suicide run towards them. Of course given one of the game's major flaws if you take the latter option it will almost always end up in death.

The flaws here are plentiful. For starters if you get hit you don't stay invincible for any real length of time, which results in enemies being able to camp inside you and drain your health bar. On top of that Michael doesn't have a jump kick, rather when he does a jump attack he sticks his arm out like he's an NFL referee signaling a first down. This will cause you to have to take every single jump slowly as you will have to land on every single obstacle so you can plant and kick the bad guy standing in your way. There are even problems when you open the door, as if you don't open it while standing at the edge of it and a bad guy is in it, you will take damage.



There is one extremely disturbing trend in this game however, and it has to do with the constant focus on the crotch. Seriously, everything is centered around crotches. When Michael kick, the kicks are to the crotch. When he punches, he punches to the crotch. And hands down the most disturbing incident is every single time he opens a door he spins around and gives a crotch thrust, which is made even more disturbing when you consider that kids are occasionally sitting in the closet door he just opened. Which means years from now when they are thinking back to their time as a kidnap victim they are going to have major breakdowns thanks to the PTSD flashbacks of Michael Jacksons crotch liberating them from bondage.

Problems aside, this is a fairly decent port of the arcade and Genesis game. Some things are missing from those versions, like magic dust flying out with every strike, and the cameo appearance of Bubbles the pet chimp. That said, it is worth checking out.



MICHAEL JACKSON'S MOONWALKER

MIRACLE WARRIORS

Release Date: 1988
Developer: ASCII Corp.
Publisher: Sega

Genre: RPG
Players: 1

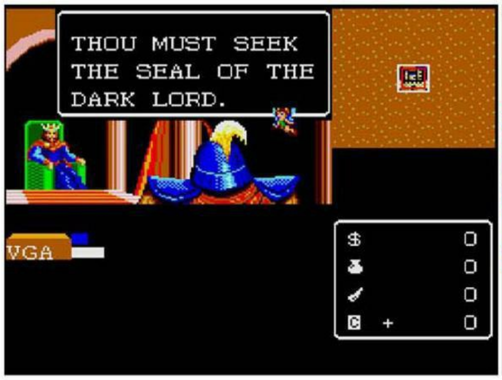
MIRACLE WARRIORS
Seal of the Dark Lord
START
CONTINUE

If you look up "Grinding" in the video game dictionary, this game would be a perfect definition of the word.

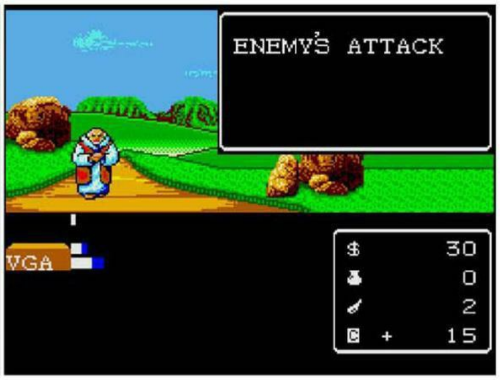
ADVENTURE ROLE-PLAYING
SEGA®
Miracle Warriors™
Seal of The Dark Lord™

If you have ever played an 8-Bit RPG (or 16-Bit, or frankly any RPG) you will be quite familiar with the basic storyline. You are a noble warrior who must assemble a party in order to defeat some untold horror that is holding your land hostage and threatening to destroy it. Unlike a lot of those other RPG's, this one is just no fun whatsoever.

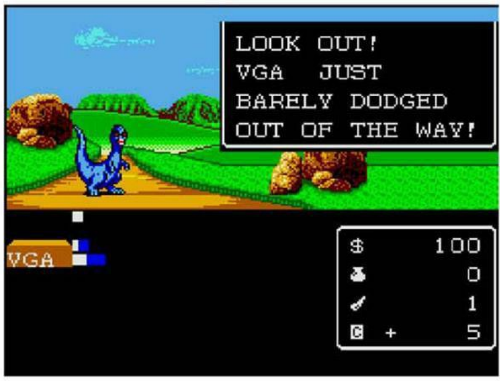
At the start you are given a demand by your king to find someone who will explain what's going on. Unfortunately you aren't given a clue as to where you are supposed to go. If you are unfortunate enough to wander into the forrest or the mountains, expect to be killed in a single blow, and even if you stick to the plains expect to be dead within two or three fights. The only way to avoid this is to make a beeline to the closest city and hope you have enough cash on hand to afford to be able to be healed from the overpriced doctor. Of course if you don't know where the closest city is (hint: it's to the South across the bridge) you will die and have to restart until you can make the run to it.



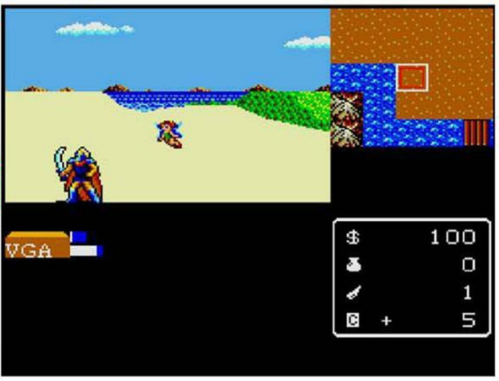
THOU MUST SEEK THE SEAL OF THE DARK LORD.



ENEMY'S ATTACK

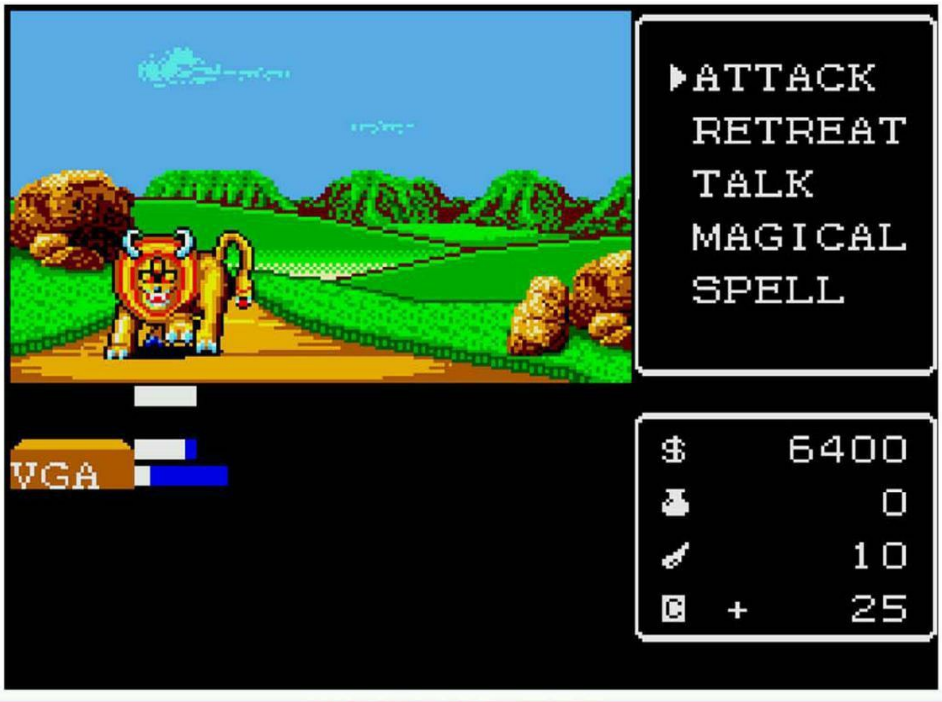


LOOK OUT! VGA JUST BARELY DODGED OUT OF THE WAY!



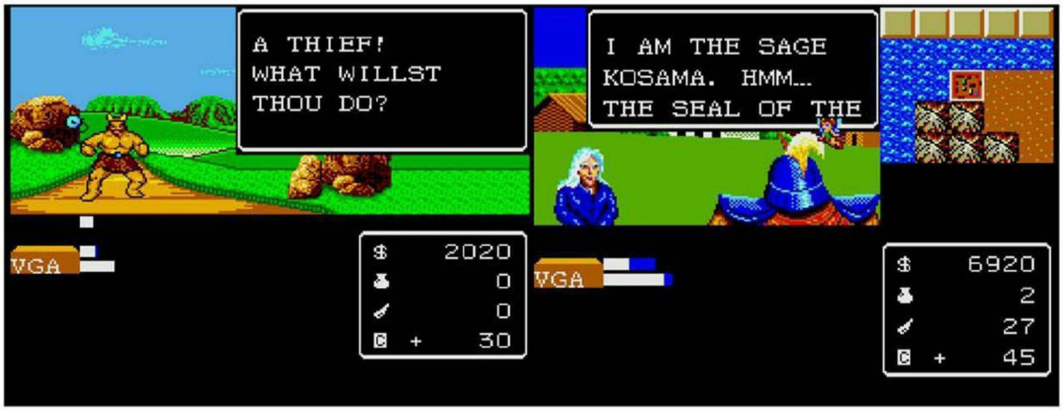
It's about this time that the game begins to completely fall apart (well that actually that happens as soon as you hit start, but I digress). During your few encounters you will have gained a few meager guilders (the in game currency) and everyone in this town is out to extort you for all its worth. Until you are fortunate enough to run into evil merchants (which give you 2,000 guilders) you will be caught in a vicious cycle of fighting, spending all your money at the doctors, fighting, etc. Want a weapon or some armor? Get ready to spend some serious time fighting low level enemies. Want to actually progress in the game? Well, that's going to cost you as well. Seriously, you have to bribe the leader of the town 500 guilders before they'll give you a hint as to what you are supposed to.

If that wasn't bad enough, the graphical presentation is one of the dullest in the history of RPGs. Instead of having a vast over world to explore, you have a static screen where you character stands, and a small map to the side with a box that you move that shows you where you are. When you get into towns it's the same thing, with you moving the box around until you find a house to inspect (which is mostly people asking for money). It really takes you out of the experience when all your attention is on the top right corner of the screen.



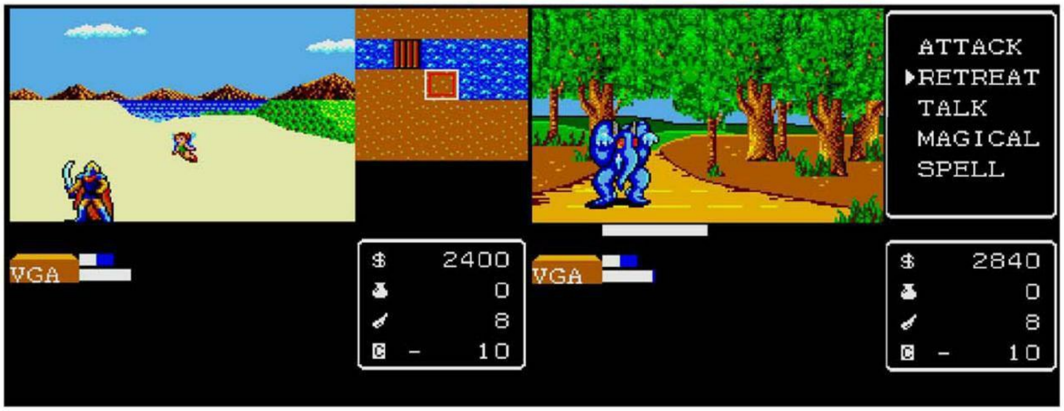
The list of problems doesn't stop there however. The battles pop up every few steps and are of the "hit and patiently wait to be hit" variety, the hints you are given are vague at best, and then there's the problem with the weapons and armor. If you grind for a while and somehow bank enough cash to buy a knife or a sword, you have to immediately go back to saving since they deteriorate rather quickly and will either need to be repaired or replaced. If you can save up a ridiculous amount of money you can buy a blacksmith that will travel around with you, but don't expect that to happen for a while. Pretty much the lone bright spot of the game is the fact that you can save anywhere.

It really is amazing to think that this primitive game came out around the same time that Final Fantasy and Phantasy Star did. Both of those franchises have survived for over two decades, while this is the only Miracle Warriors. That should tell you all you need to know about this game.



A THIEF!
WHAT WILLST
THOU DO?

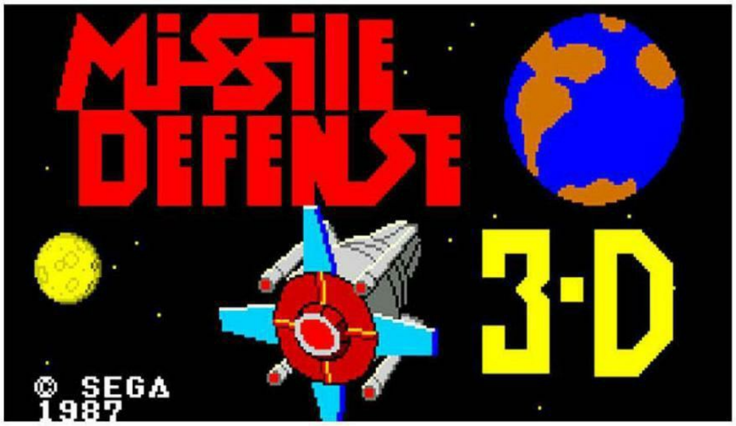
I AM THE SAGE
KOSAMA. HMM...
THE SEAL OF THE



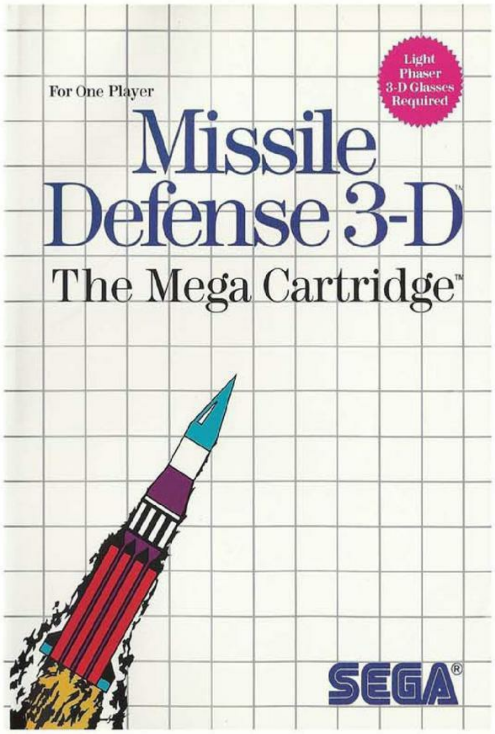
MISSILE DEFENSE 3-D

Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

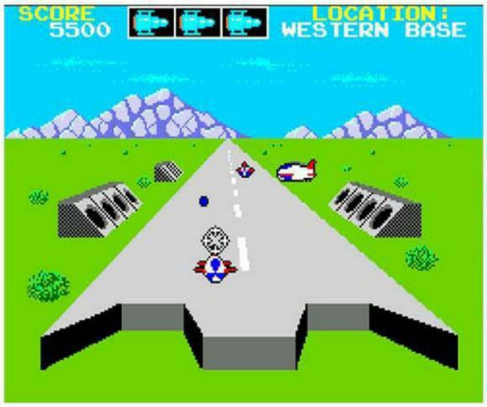
Genre: Light Gun Shooter
Players: 1

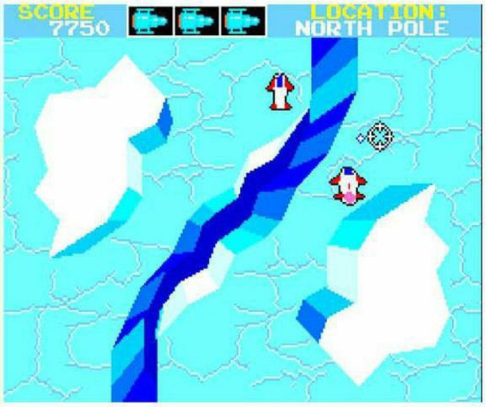

Missile
Defense
3-D
© SEGA
1987

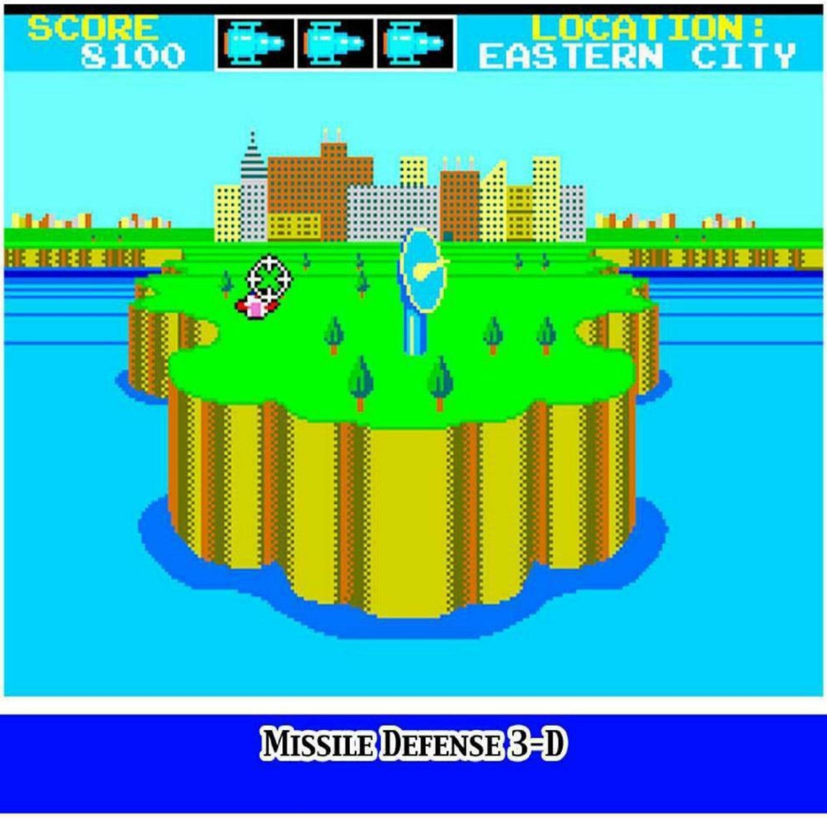
Missile Defense 3-D is arguably the best 3-D game for the Master System. Granted that's a pretty low bar given there were only six 3-D games released.


For One Player
Light Phaser 3-D Glasses Required
Missile Defense 3-D
The Mega Cartridge
SEGA

The concept is simple, you are tasked with shooting down nuclear missiles with a hand held light gun. It remains to be seen exactly why your handgun is so incredibly powerful, but hey, it's a video game so we are going to roll with it. At the start of the level multiple missiles are launched, some that head directly off screen, and some directly for you. If one scores a direct hit on you it takes a bit of health away, which is big since you can only withstand a limited number of hits. If you miss the ones that are moving away from you it's not the end of the world (yet).

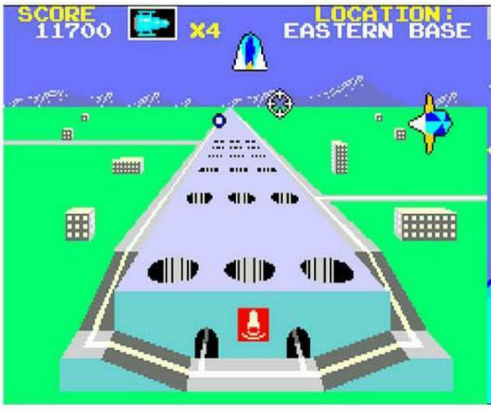

SCORE
5500
LOCATION:
WESTERN BASE

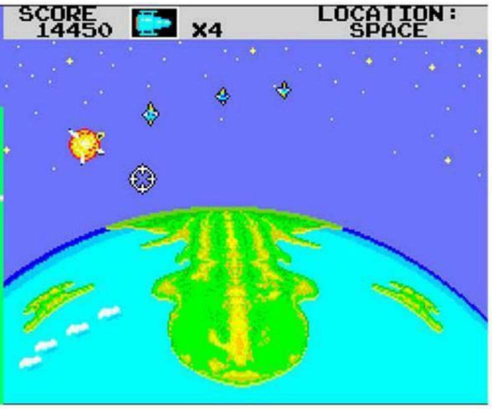

SCORE
7750
LOCATION:
NORTH POLE

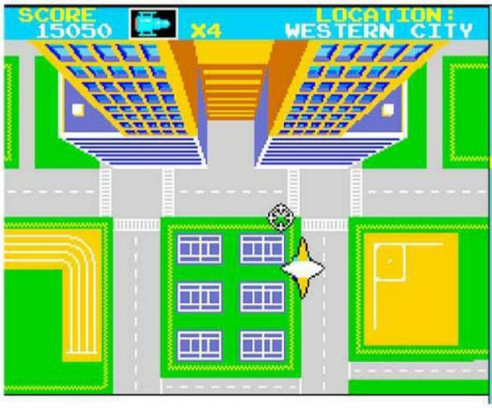

SCORE
8100
LOCATION:
EASTERN CITY

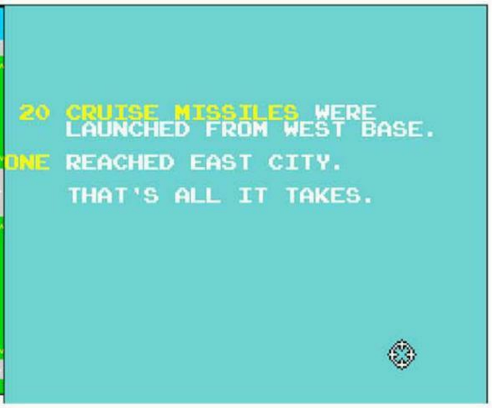
After the first batch of missiles are launched you will be given stats of how many you shot down and how many more you have to shoot. If you fail to shoot them all down on the first level you will only have to take down the remaining handful on the next stage (i.e if 20 are fired and you shoot 15, there will only be 5 missiles on the next level). If you let any slip by on the second stage you will have one final chance as it descends upon the city, which can be incredibly difficult as it will appear out of nowhere and detonate before you know it. If one of the bombs finds its target it's game over, although the game does have a way of putting a guilt trip on you. The final screen says something to the effect of "one got through, and that's all it takes. Game Over".

And that's pretty much it. Even by light gun game standards it's pretty basic, but it knows what it is and it does it pretty well. Even though the game is in 3-D it's borderline playable without the glasses, although I would recommend a large bottle of Advil to go along with it.









20 CRUISE MISSILES WERE LAUNCHED FROM WEST BASE.

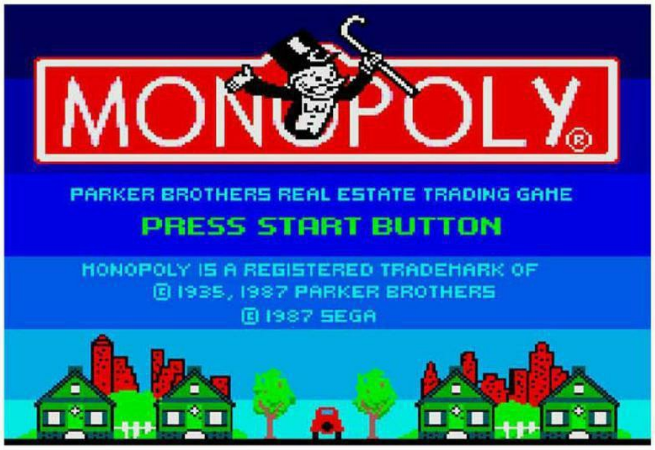
ONE REACHED EAST CITY.

THAT'S ALL IT TAKES.

MONOPOLY

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Board Game
Players: 1 - 10

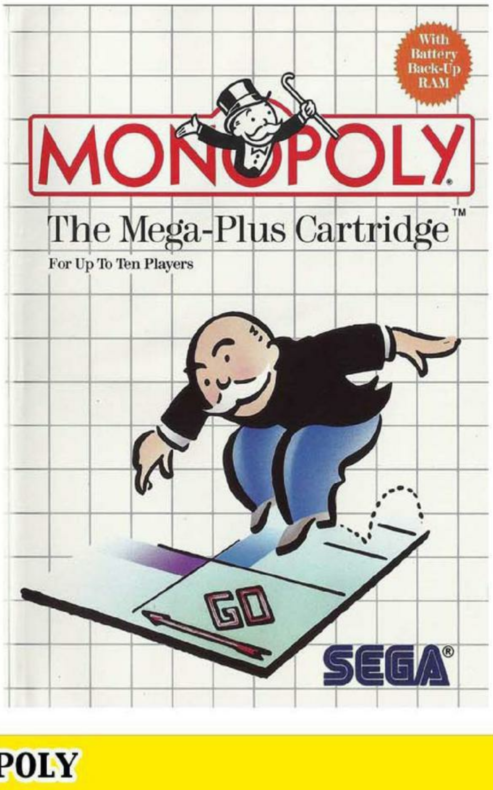


PARKER BROTHERS REAL ESTATE TRADING GAME

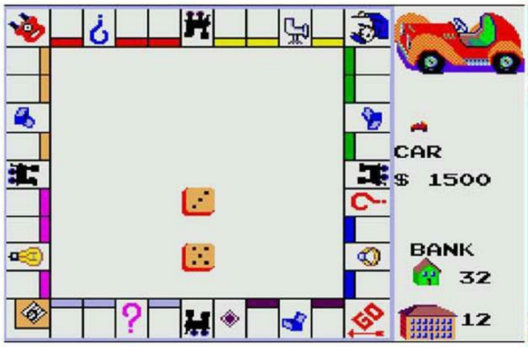
PRESS START BUTTON

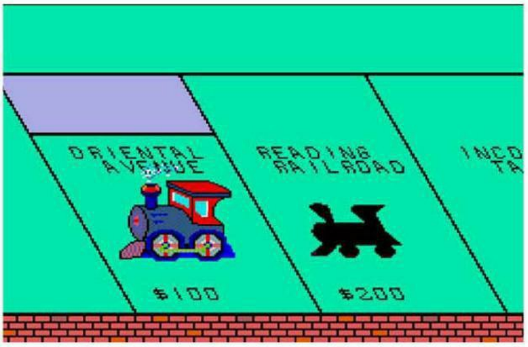
MONOPOLY IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF
© 1935, 1987 PARKER BROTHERS
© 1987 SEGA

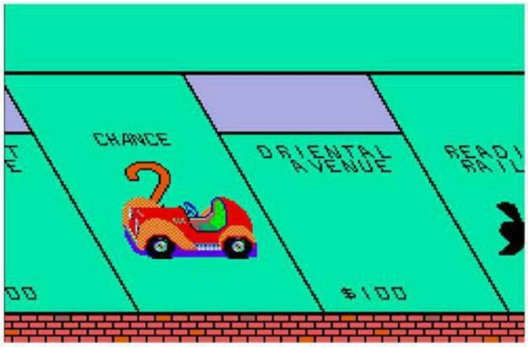
While it is kind of odd to pay fifty dollars for a digital version of a fifteen dollar board game, I guess it makes sense for those poor kids who have no friends.

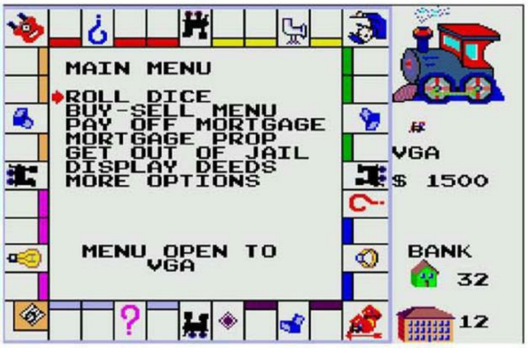

With Battery Back-Up RAM
MONOPOLY®
The Mega-Plus Cartridge™
For Up To Ten Players
GO
SEGA®

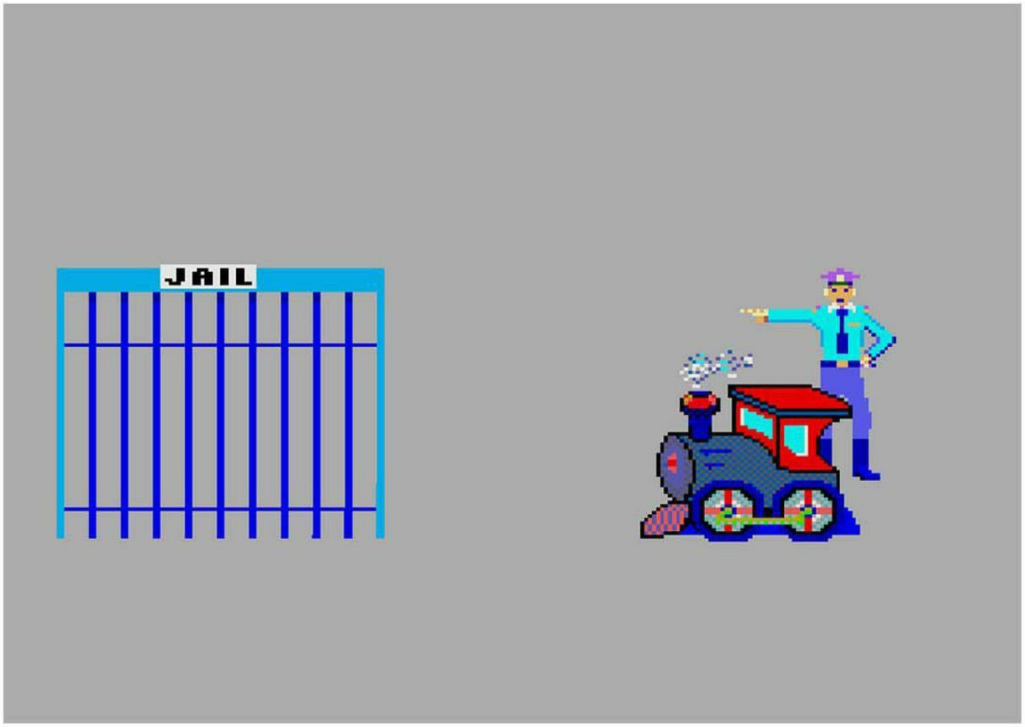
For the three of you out there who have never heard of Monopoly, basically it's a game where you set out on a quest to become a slum lord. As you make your way around the board you have the opportunity to purchase the properties that you land on. These can range from basic properties to utilities to the railroads. There are also spaces that require you to draw a card that can instigate a financial transaction or move to random spaces on the board. If you get all the properties within a certain color group you can start building homes and hotels which jack up the rent on anyone else that is unfortunate enough to land there. This goes on until one person has a total monopoly and owns everything by way of bankrupting everyone else. Oh, and given that this version has the ability for ten people to play in the same game you should get comfortable because it's going to take a while. Thankfully there is a save feature, so you can spread out the never ending game over days.


CAR
$ 1500
BANK
32
12


ORIENTAL AVENUE
READING RAILROAD
INCO TA
$100
$200


CHANCE
ORIENTAL AVENUE
READI RAIL
$100


MAIN MENU
ROLL DICE
BUY-SELL MENU
PAY OFF MORTGAGE
MORTGAGE PROP
GET OUT OF JAIL
DISPLAY DEEDS
MORE OPTIONS
MENU OPEN TO VGA
VGA
$ 1500
BANK
32
12



There are a couple of other nice features about the Master System version that set it apart from the much cheaper real version. First off there are plenty of nice animations of your selected token making its way across the board, which thankfully can be fast forwarded through. The other feature is quite nice for people who were poor at math (or just lazy), as the computer keeps track of all transactions. This also prevents a shady banker from slipping hundreds into his stack whenever you get up to grab a drink (you know who you are).

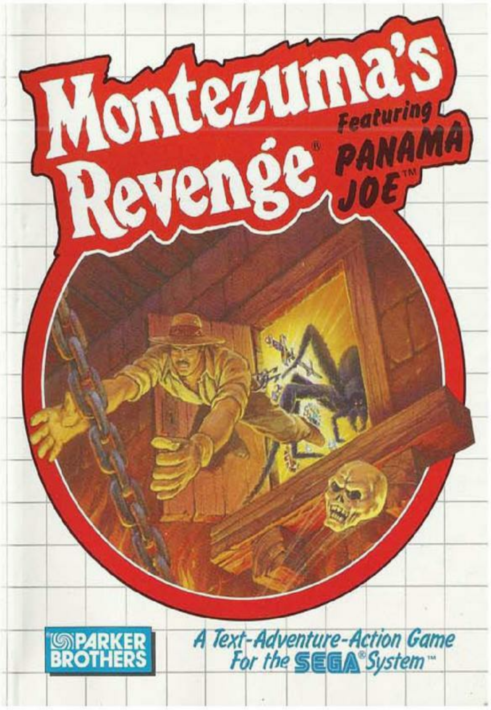
Other than those few features, it's just plain old Monopoly. So go on, grab a controller and set out to be the best darn slum lord you can be.

MONTEZUMA'S REVENGE

Release Date: 1989
Developer: Parker Brothers
Publisher: Parker Brothers

Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1

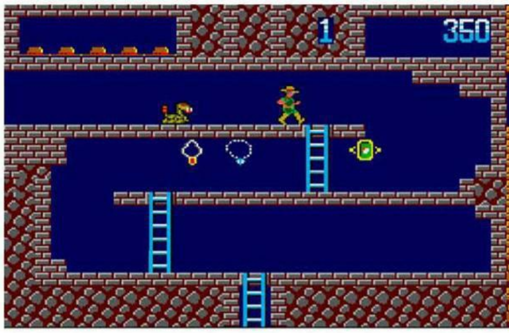
Montezuma's Revenge

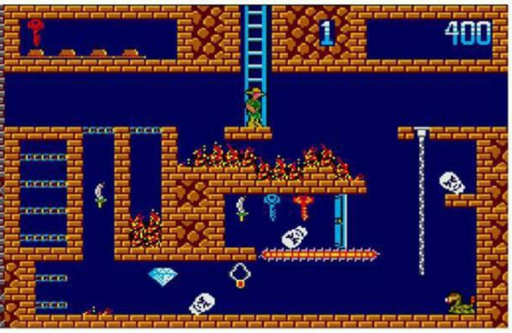

Montezuma's Revenge®
Featuring PANAMA JOE™
PARKER BROTHERS
A Text-Adventure-Action Game For the SEGA® System™

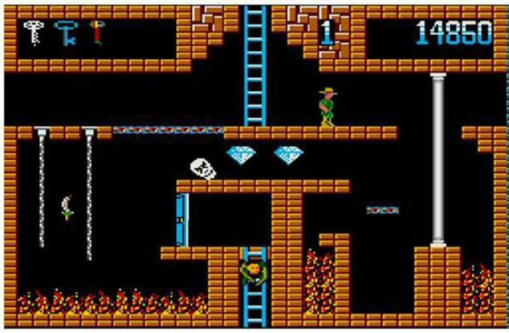
Montezumas Revenge is a tough action platforming game for the Master System, however it is tough for all the wrong reasons.

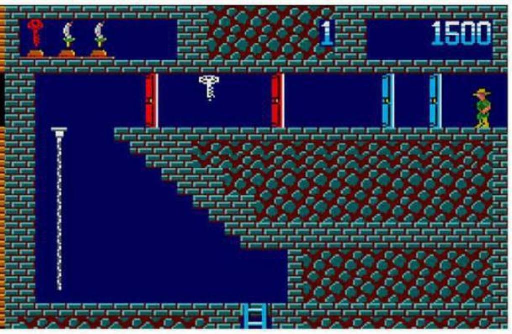
You control Panama Joe as he attempts to rob Montezuma's Aztec Pyramid of all it's valuables. Standing in his way is an army of rolling skulls, rattlesnakes, and laser barriers. Wait, laser barriers? Wow, I knew that the Aztecs were an advanced civilization, but I had no idea they were that far advanced. Not that it really did them a lot of good…

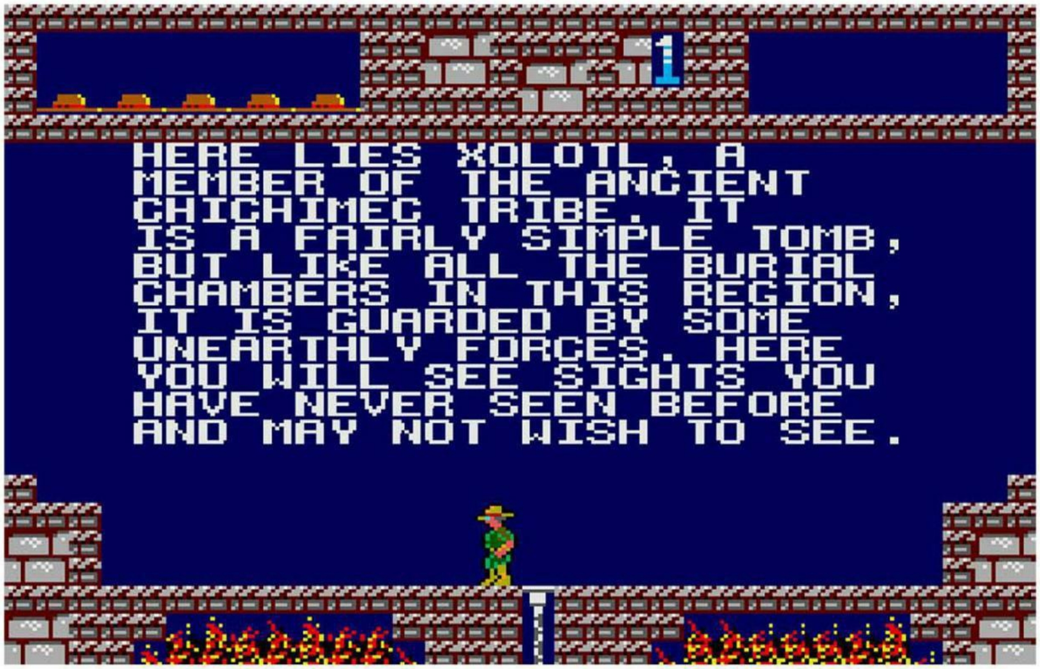
When you start you get to choose from one of six tombs to explore. There isn't a ton of difference in how they play, so it's really just more of a difficulty selection. There are some layout changes, but for the most part it just determines how fast the enemies move and how many laser barriers stand in your way. Although the higher levels have one of the cheapest, most infuriating enemies ever to grace a video game screen. If you stay on a screen for more than a few seconds a bat will swoop in, make a beeline for you, and carry you off screen and apparently eat you since you lose a life. There really isn't any escape from it unless you have a weapon handy (which is rare) or you are standing right by an exit.





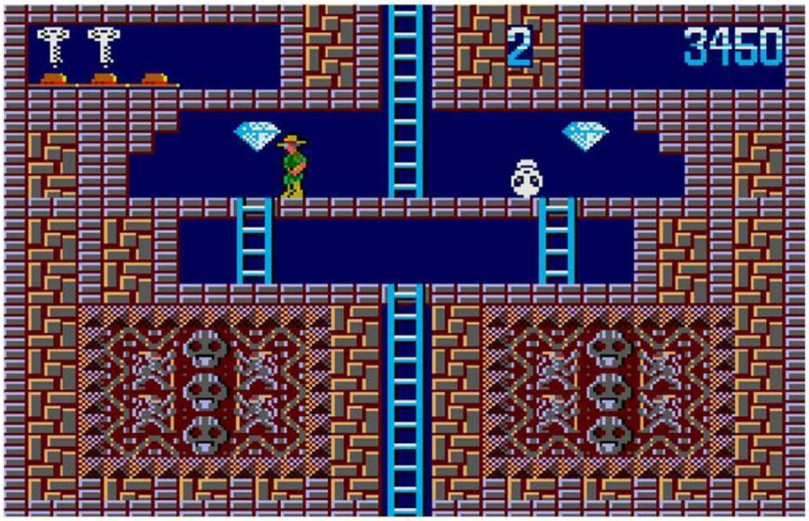






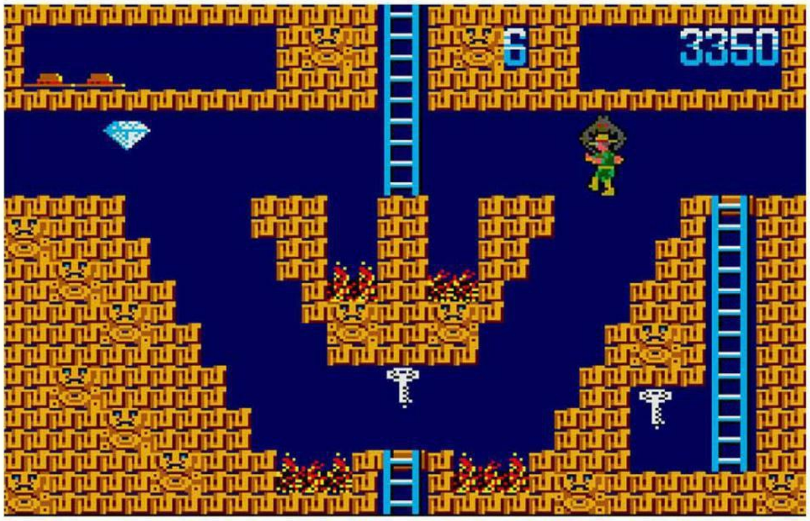
HERE LIES XOLOTL, A MEMBER OF THE ANCIENT CHICHIMEC TRIBE. IT IS A FAIRLY SIMPLE TOMB, BUT LIKE ALL THE BURIAL CHAMBERS IN THIS REGION, IT IS GUARDED BY SOME UNEARTHLY FORCES. HERE YOU WILL SEE SIGHTS YOU HAVE NEVER SEEN BEFORE AND MAY NOT WISH TO SEE.

The gameplay is similar to Pitfall in that you run and jump while trying to collect treasure. Unlike Pitfall however your character is cursed with brittle bone syndrome. Now I applaud Panama Joe for not letting his condition slow him down in his quest to become a rough and tumble grave robber, but it makes the game borderline impossible. See, if Panama Joe falls from virtually any height he dies, which not only makes exploring a tomb filled with hundreds of platforms difficult, but it also sucks the fun right out of the game. If you have been playing video games for longer than twenty minutes, you will have to make a conscious effort to suppress your instincts and go running and jumping. To make things worse, there are several precision jumping segments you have to complete, and since you have no control over his jump once he's airborne, expect to watch him plummet to his death on a frequent basis. Honestly, if the designers set out to create a robust ladder climbing simulation they were ultimately successful. Somehow though I doubt that's what they were going for.



In addition to all the treasure you are collecting, you can pick up a number of items to help you along the way. There are a couple of weapons, one of which will kill an enemy if you touch them and another that allows you to run though all enemies for a short time. There are also three varieties of keys, white, blue, and red, which allows you to open doors of the appropriate color. Tracking some of these down can be a chore, especially when you have to complete difficult jumping segments to get them.

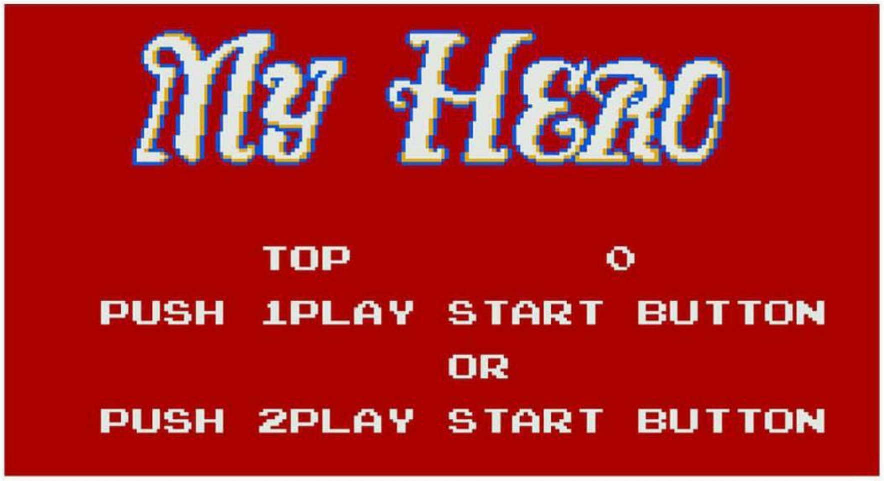
The brittle bone syndrome aside, this is a solid game if you can adjust your playing style and suppress virtually every single instinct you have when it comes to playing games.



MY HERO

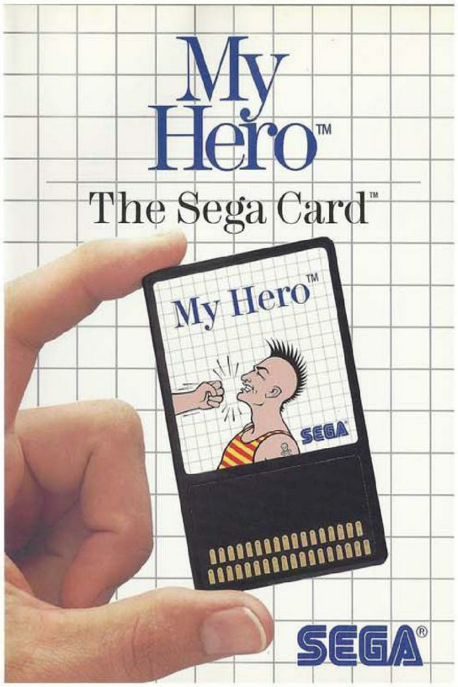
Release Date: 1986
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1 - 2



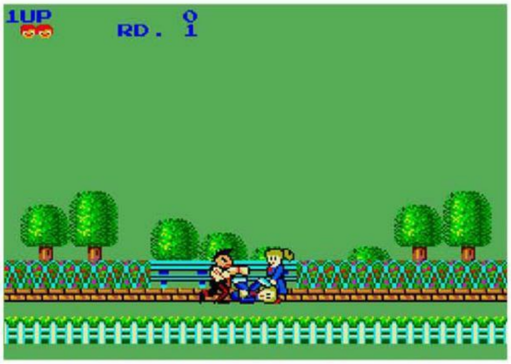
TOP 0
PUSH 1PLAY START BUTTON
OR
PUSH 2PLAY START BUTTON

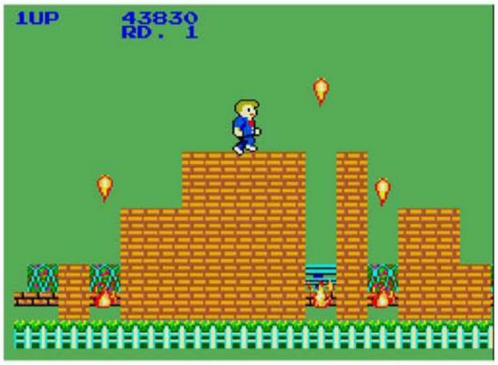
This port of the arcade game is arguably the toughest of the 8-Bit era.

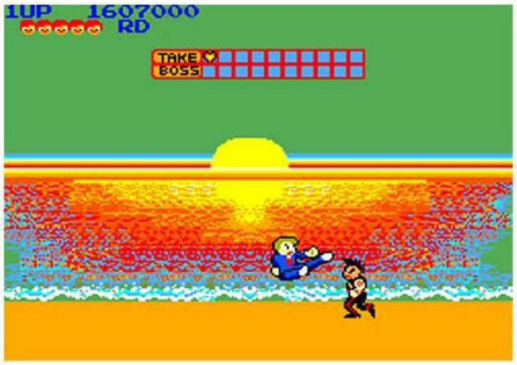

My Hero™
The Sega Card™
My Hero™
SEGA
SEGA®

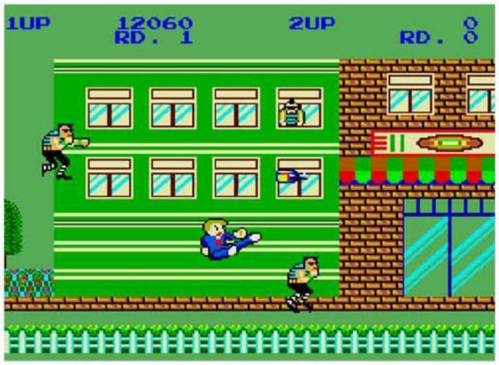
You control a kung fu master who is cleverly disguised as a wall street banker. On a quiet walk through the park he falls victim to the great girlfriend kidnapping epidemic of the late 80's, when a street thug knocks him over while grabbing his woman and running off. Rather than lay on the ground whimpering, our kung fu master leaps into action, and by leap I mean he tries to jump kick every single person in his path. Sadly this noble task of putting foot to face is much more difficult than it should be thanks to one hit deaths.

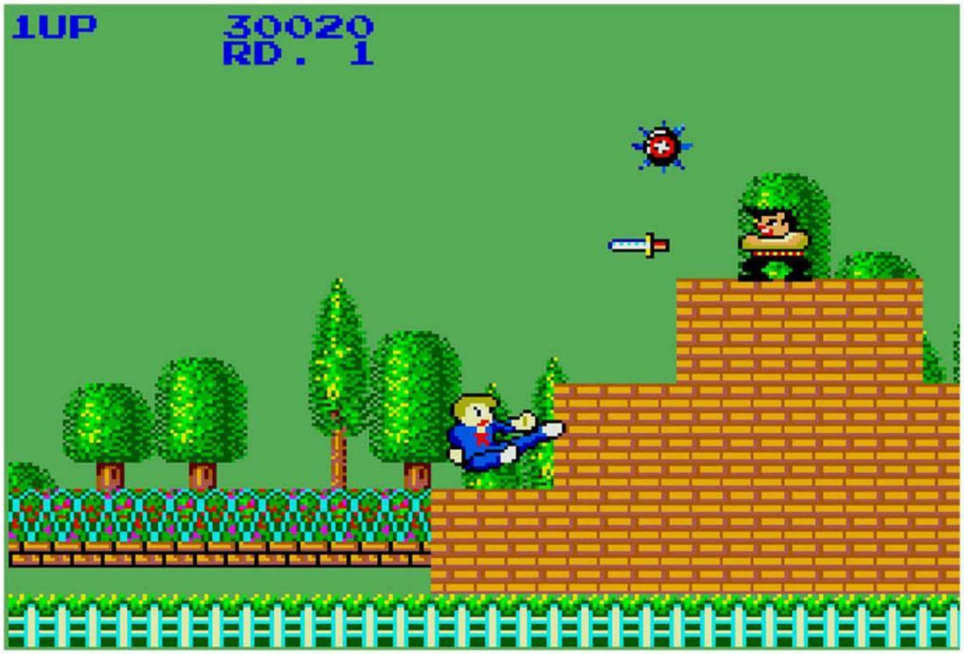
Now one hit deaths are common during this era of gaming, but the prevalence with which they are found here are greater than virtually any other game. Part of the problem is that the hero has an incredibly slow punch. How slow you ask? Well, if there are two guys running at you who are a quarter of the screen apart, it is doubtful that you will have time to punch the first one, reload the punch and hit the second one before he decks you. As a result the only real option is your jump kick, which has its own issues.









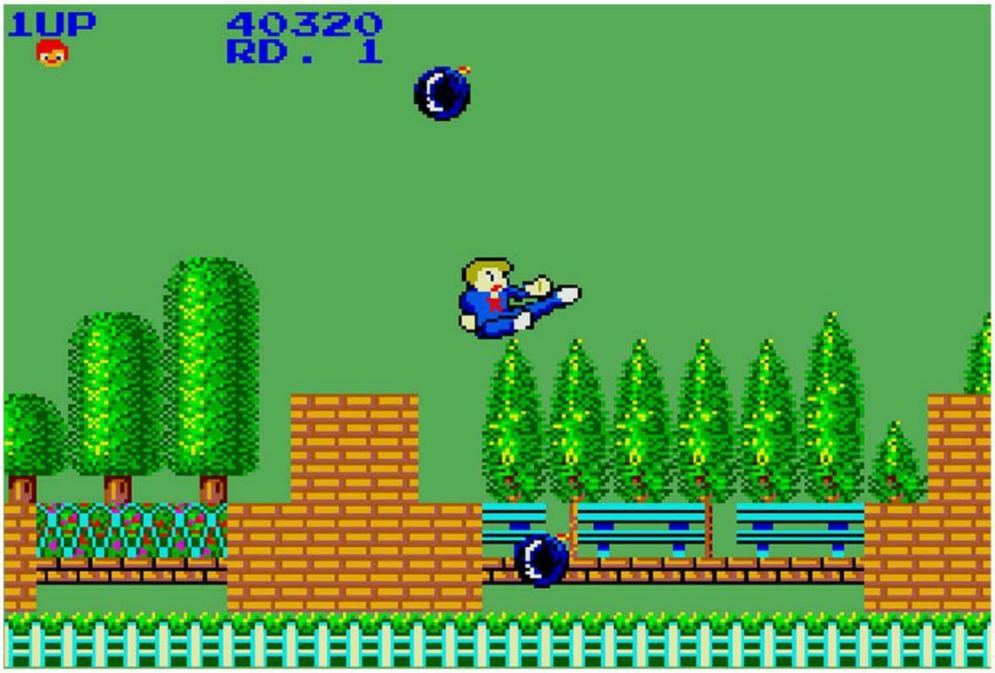


The good things about your kick is that you have total control over it (meaning that you can change directions in the air), and that your kick can take out multiple enemies at a time. The bad thing is that if you time your kick wrong the bad guy can punch you in the head before you can even get off the ground. The worse thing is that if you time it wrong and land just behind an enemy and touch his back you still fall to the ground unconscious and on deaths door. I'm not sure what Kung Fu school this guy went to, but they sure didn't teach him how to take a punch, or even a light touch for that matter.

There are a grand total of three levels to play though, all of which look identical just with slightly different layouts and enemies. Once you reach the end of the level you face off against the kidnapper in a lengthy one on one duel, which after winning our hero is sucker punched and his girlfriend is kidnapped once again. If you somehow make it to level four you'll find that it's exactly like level one, just with faster enemies. One could say that this puts a damper on replay value, but who are we kidding, unless you use save states like a madman (or are Fred Savages kid brother from The Wizard) you aren't going to see level four. Heck, you aren't going to see level two.

The levels do take a confusing turn about halfway through them however. At the start you are fighting the generic bad guys that can be found in every game like this. There's the standard "run and punch" guy, the "knife throwing" guy, the "drop the bottle from the fourth story apartment" guy (although the bottle can be kicked and sent flying across the screen killing anyone in its path). Then from out of nowhere the game turns into Super Mario Brothers where you have to make a series of complicated jumps while dodging random things. There are bouncing spiked mines that come out of nowhere (and will kill you by spawning on you), giant bombs, even flame plants that shoot fireballs into the sky. Not only does this feel completely out of place, it adds a whole new level of frustration.

If you want to see an extreme example of how unforgiving mid-80's arcade games could be, this is a fantastic choice. If you want a game that where you can satisfyingly beat up a small army of bad guys with a near invincible hero then you should try elsewhere.

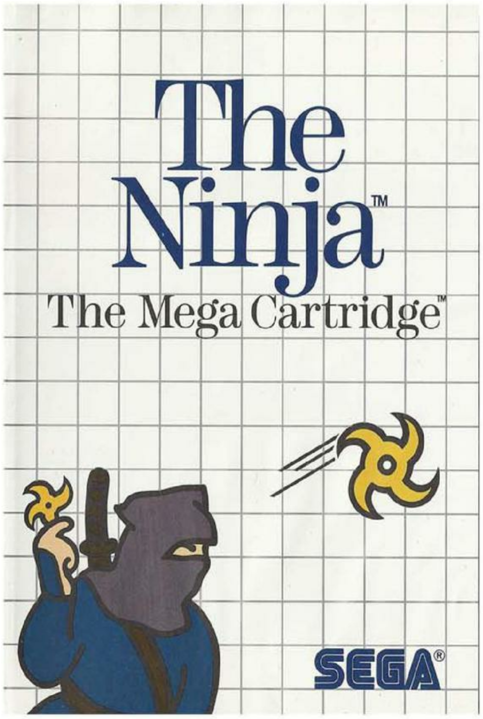


THE NINJA

Release Date: 1986
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

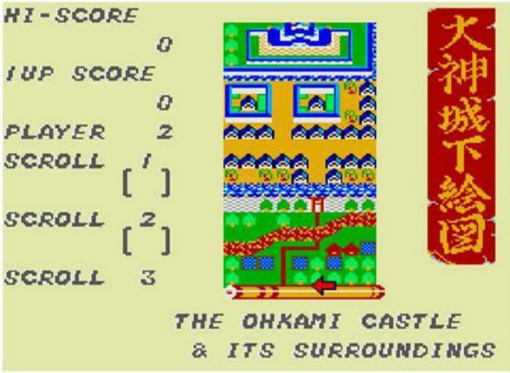
Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1

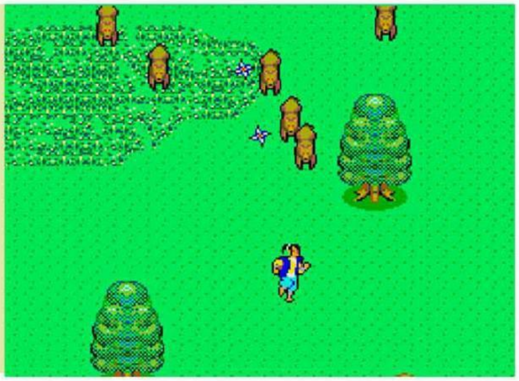
You are in control of, well, a Ninja on a quest to rescue your princess girlfriend. Seriously, even 1630's Japan wasn't immune from the late 80's kidnapped girlfriend epidemic. Anyway, in order to rescue your beloved girlfriend, you must run through thirteen levels of ninja fueled chaos.

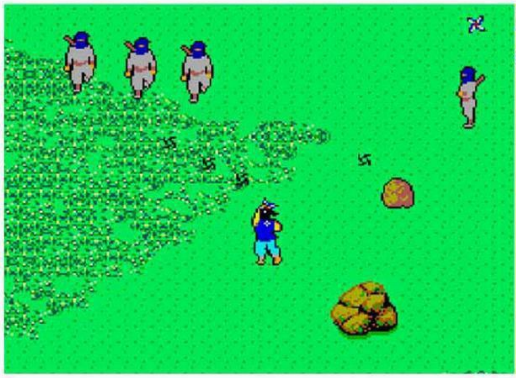

The Ninja™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

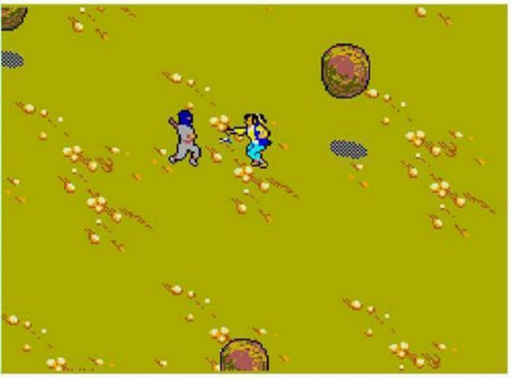
Now when I say ninja fueled chaos, I'm not kidding. There are ninjas with swords that will run full speed at you as well as ninjas with shurikens that, for some reason, will also run right at you at full speed (hey, I never said the enemy ninjas were smart). There are also a variety of hidden ninjas that will catch you off guard if you aren't paying attention. While you are running through the level chucking shurikens at the oncoming barrage of ninjas it's rather easy to run right by an innocent looking rock, of course if you do there's a good chance you are going to get a nasty surprise once the shuriken throwing ninja jumps out. The rock ninjas are the lucky ones however since some of their brethren apparently drew the short straw in the pre-battle meeting and are forced to hide in rabid dogs.

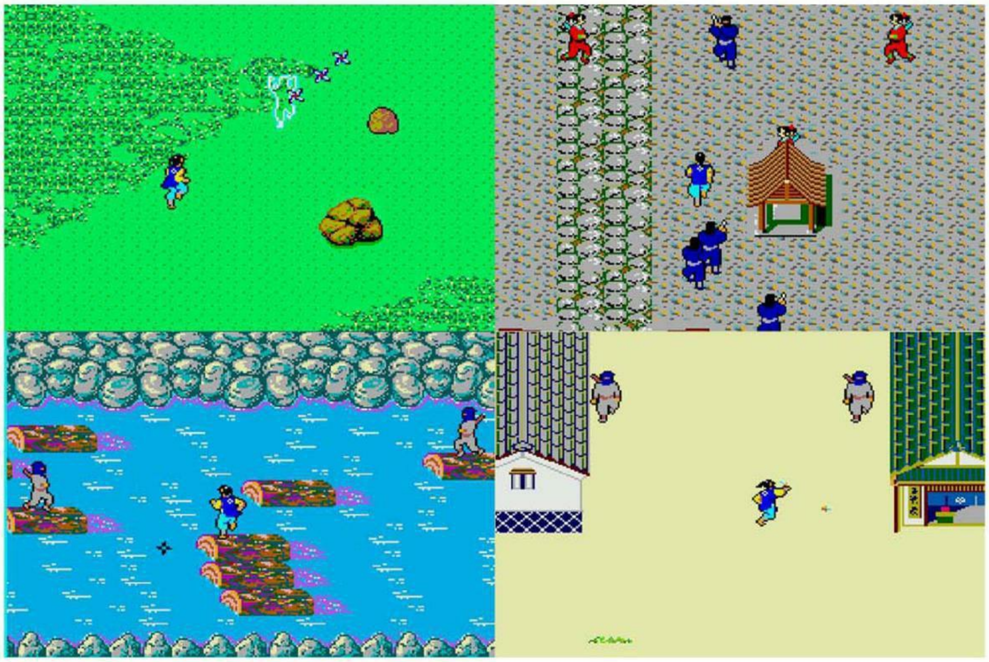
(Side Note: How does anybody think that hiding in a dog is a good idea? I can understand hiding in rocks or in trees since they can be hollowed out, but how do you hollow out a dog? Worse yet, how would you like to be the guy that has to explain to the ninja how he has to get inside the dog? I get the sense the guys that deliver that news have a very short life expectancy.)









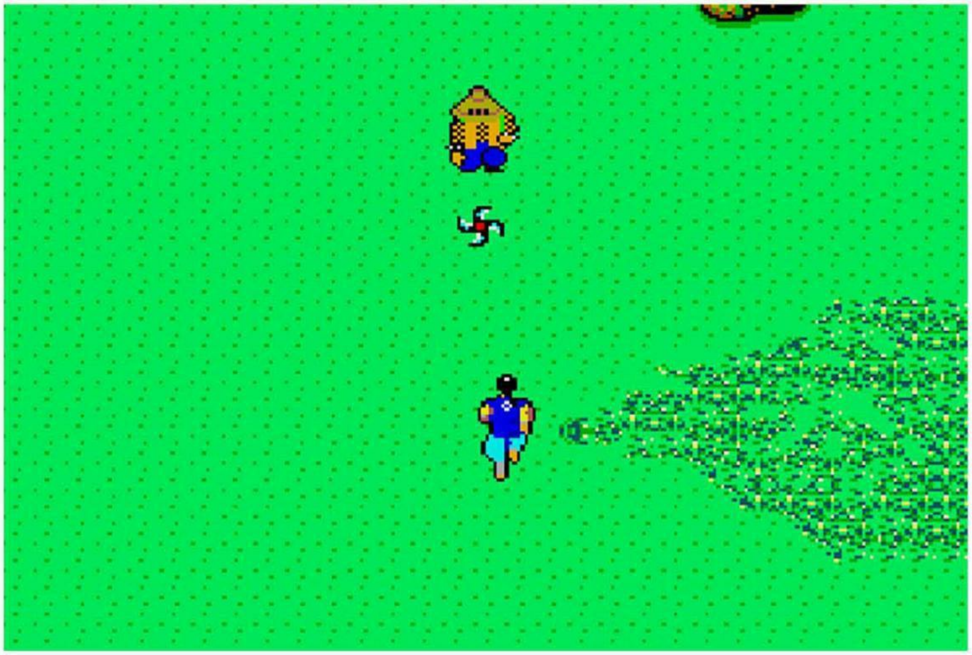


Even though the odds are stacked against you, the playing field is leveled a bit thanks to an unlimited supply of throwing knives being at your disposal. Some enemies are even nice enough to drop scrolls that can do everything from making you run faster to giving you bigger and more powerful shurikens (it is good to see though that even in 1630's Japan bad guys still were courteous enough to always carry items that could help the invaders. Who knows, maybe that's where the long held video game tradition began). Unlimited ammo isn't the only thing you have in your arsenal, as you also have the ability to disappear in a cloud of smoke and reappear behind your enemies. Unfortunately the disappearing act only last for a few seconds, which means if you aren't quick enough you'll end up reappearing inside of an enemy, resulting in death.

The levels are pretty diverse for a game like this. In addition to the standard run up screen and kill everything in your path, there are also diagonal stages where you must dodge falling boulders while killing everything in your path. There is also a Frogger inspired level where you are on floating logs fighting ninjas, among others. These non-traditional levels add an extra layer of depth to the game and really do a great job of keeping the game fresh.

There are a couple of minor flaws with The Ninja. First off, the levels are really short. How short are they? Well, in the time it took you to read this sentence you could have been at the boss of level one. Which brings me to the next flaw, the bosses. Apparently you can't keep a bad guy down since the boss is essentially the same mask wearing guy level after level. While fighting the same boss over and over isn't the end of the world, a variety of bosses would have added a lot to the game. The only other thing that could be considered a flaw is the inclusion of one hit deaths. When the action gets fast and furious it is too easy to get clipped by something, which can be frustrating. However given the arcade style of the game I'm willing to overlook the one hit deaths and embrace the challenge (plus it helps that it doesn't cost me a quarter to continue, so when a game ends in three minutes I'm just a button press away from getting back in the fight).

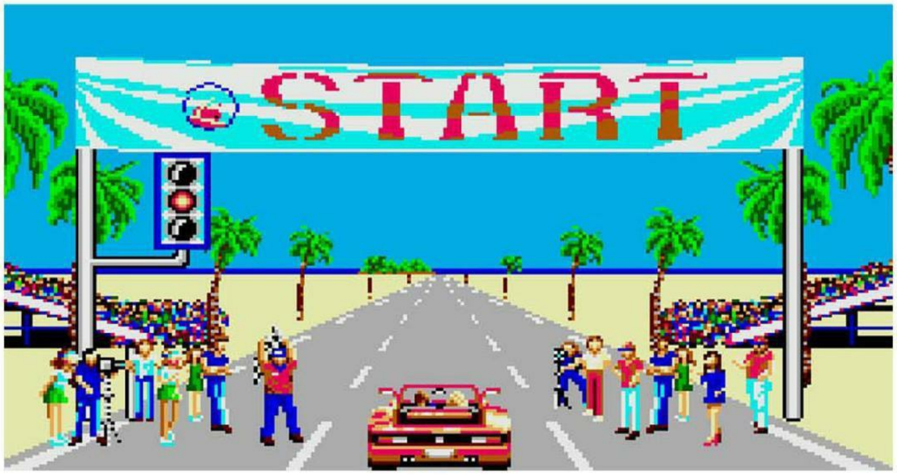
Minor flaws aside, The Ninja is a prime example of what an 80's action game was all about. It's a fast paced non-stop symphony of ninja fueled chaos that despite being nearly twenty-five years old still holds up today. If you are in need of a ninja fix, this is a good place to get it.



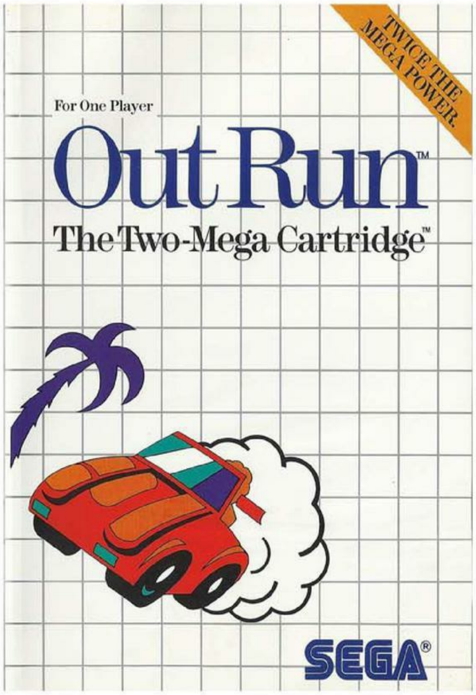
OUTRUN

Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Racing
Players: 1

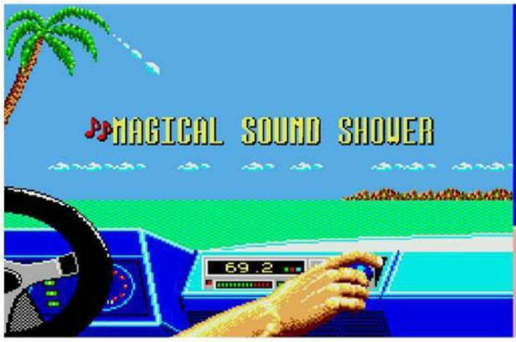


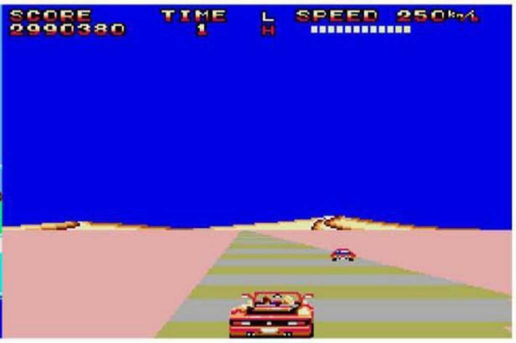
Outrun is a very impressive 8-Bit port of the arcade racing game. Unlike a lot of the 8-Bit ports, just about everything that made the arcade game great are present here.


TWICE THE MEGA POWER.
For One Player
Out Run™
The Two-Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

The premise is simple, you and your blonde girlfriend are driving a hot red sports car through a massive multi-branching road race. All told there are fifteen different locales for you to race through, although you can only see five of them during a given play through. You start the race with eighty seconds to reach the next checkpoint, and gain an additional sixty-five seconds upon reaching it. Given that each segment of the race takes roughly 65-70 seconds to complete, you will have to be nearly perfect in order to complete the race, which is easier said than done.

For the most part the controls are pretty tight. You can maneuver around what little traffic there is and can take corners pretty tight. The exception is when you come out of corners and apparently hit a patch of ice because your car will fly from one side of the road to the other. Unless you are very lucky will usually end up in your car either spinning out of flipping down the roadway (and for those of you wanting to see your driving crew ejected from the car like the arcade game, I'm sorry to report that it is not present here).


MAGICAL SOUND SHOWER
69.2


SCORE
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TIME
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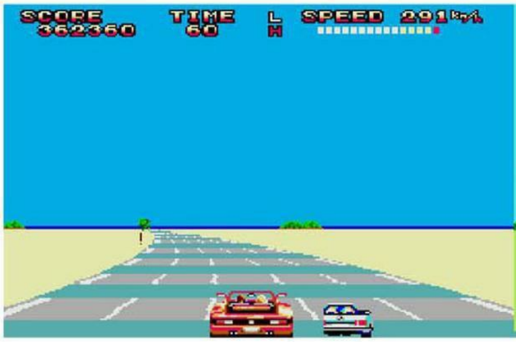
SPEED 250km/h


SCORE
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TIME
60
L
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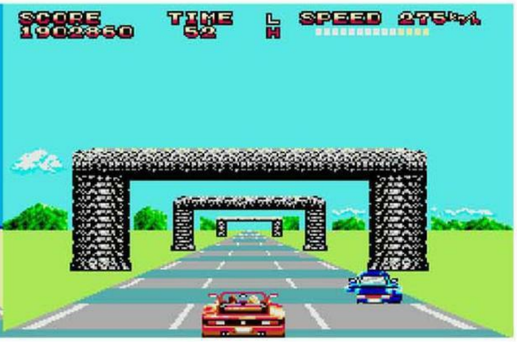
SPEED 291km/h


SCORE
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TIME
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L
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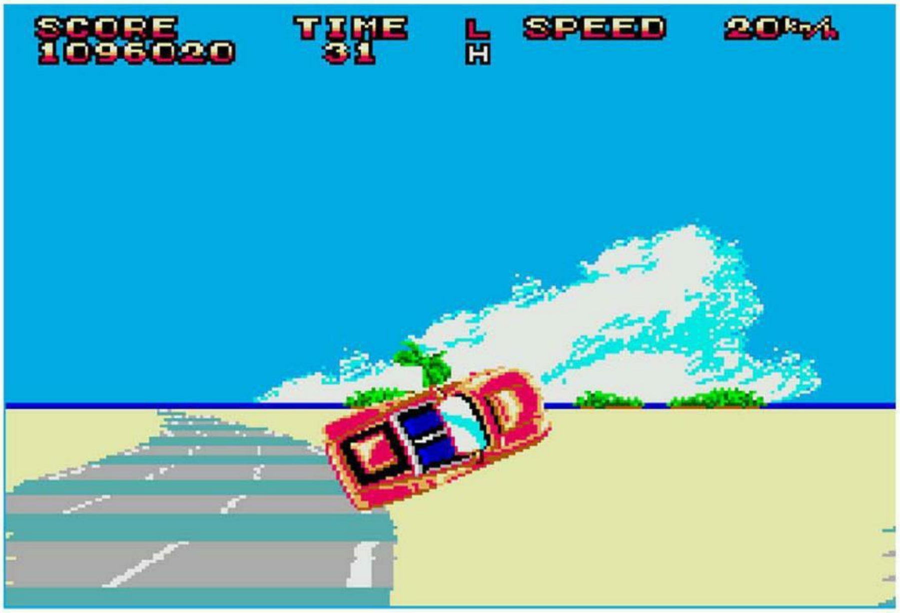
SPEED 275km/h

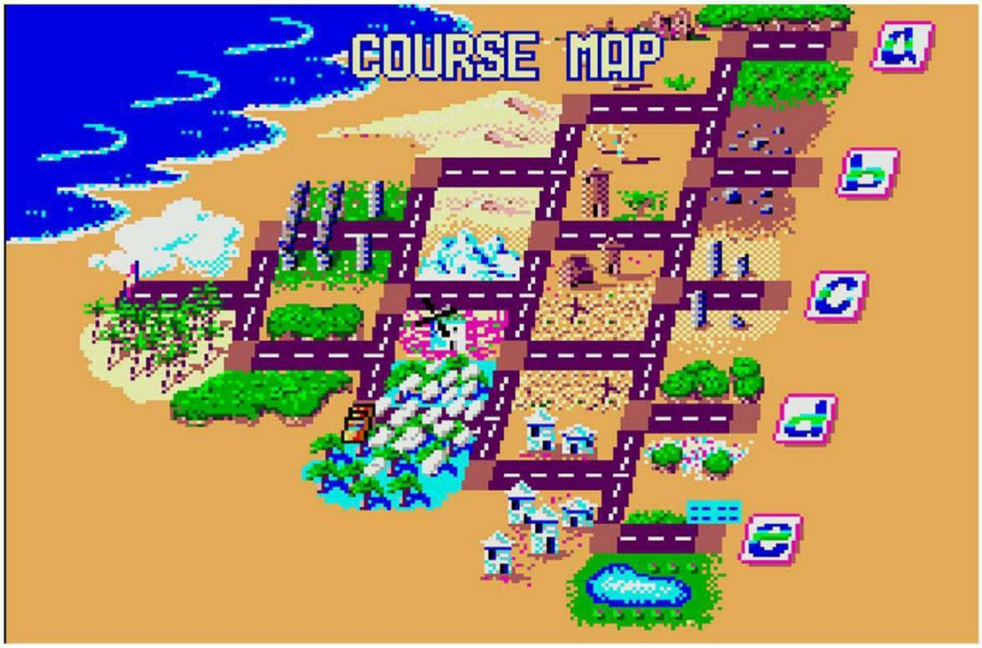


When you are approaching the end of a race segment the road will fork and you will have to pick left or right. Your choice will determine which stage you race through next. The stages are pretty much the same thing just with different backgrounds. These include everything from a beach resort to the desert to what looks to be the Alps. While it doesn't really change the core mechanics of the racing, it is kind of nice to be able to take a different trip during the race. In addition to giving you something new to look at while racing, if you are fortunate enough to finish the race it will determine what ending you get. There are five possible outcomes to your race, each with a unique short ending. If you need help plotting your course to find the ending you haven't seen, at the end of the race your progress can be tracked by a tournament bracket shaped course, which tracks the path you chose.

The biggest standout in this game is without a doubt the music. It is not only fantastic, but like the arcade version you can tune the radio dial to the cruising music you want. There are three different and distinct songs to pick from, and they all sound pretty amazing for an early 8-Bit title. The only thing that doesn't work when it comes to sound is the screeching of your tires when you are taking a tight corner. If you ever wondered what the video game equivalent of fingernails on a chalkboard is, well wonder no more. As soon as you take that first sharp corner you will want to mute the TV.

The only downside to the game is how short it is. Even if you play it perfectly it will be finished in just about seven minutes. Even if you play through and see each ending your total playtime will be a little more than half an hour. While it is understandable given that the arcade original was designed to be short and difficult as to extract more quarters from players, it still means a short gaming experience for the home console. The saving grace however is that it is incredibly difficult to finish the race since one mistake will often doom you, so it will take some time before you will see an ending, which in the mid-eighties was a fairly customary tool for extending the life of an arcade port.

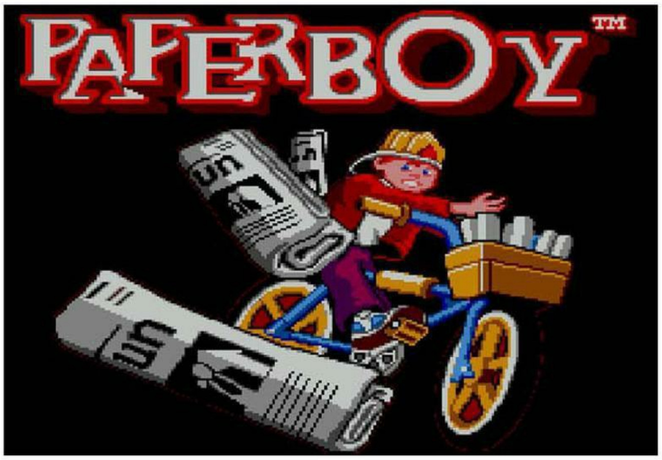
Despite the minor omission of the flying passengers from the wrecked car and the screeching tires, this is an incredibly solid port of the arcade game.



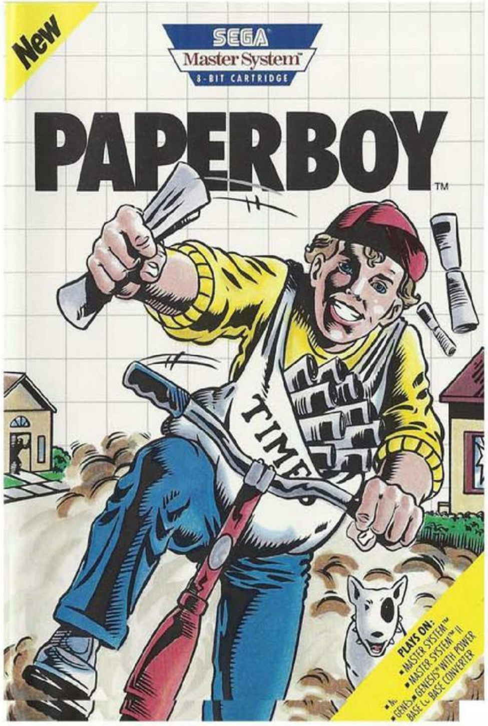
PAPERBOY

Release Date: 1990
Developer: Tiertex
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1

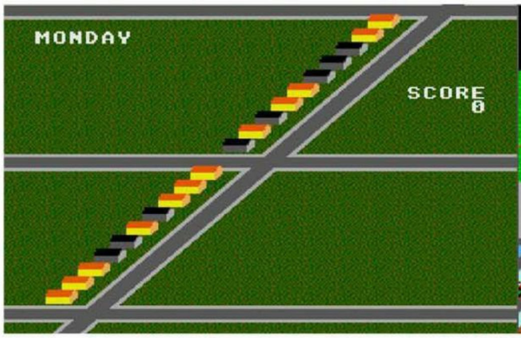


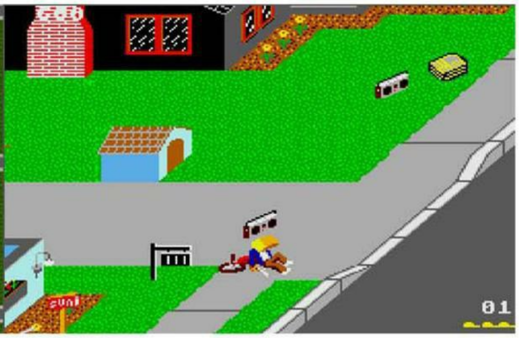
In this incredibly poor port of the arcade classic, you are in control of the poor paperboy who must deliver papers to the worst neighborhood in the country.

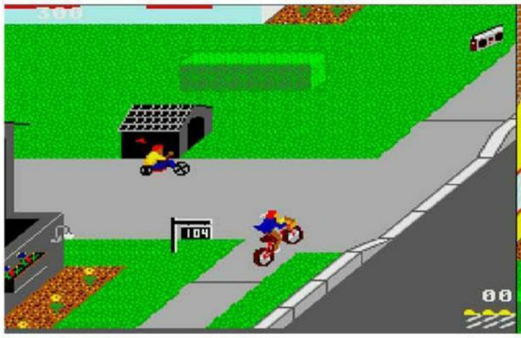

New
SEGA
Master System
8-BIT CARTRIDGE
PAPERBOY™
TIMES
PLAYS ON:
• MASTER SYSTEM™
• MASTER SYSTEM™ II
• GENESIS® WITH POWER BASE CONVERTER

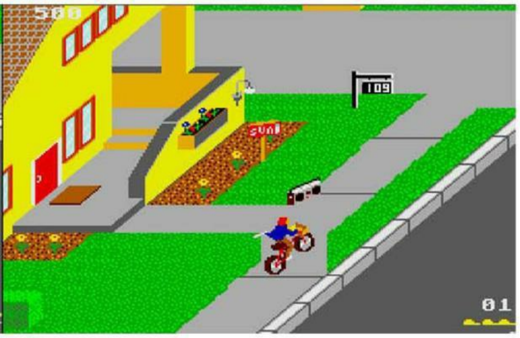
The levels are broken up into days with the ultimate goal to be to survive until the end of the week. At the beginning of each day a map of your route will come up and show you who your customers are and which houses are not. If you fail to deliver a paper to a customer they will cancel their subscription, however if you somehow manage to successfully deliver papers to all of your customers you gain a new one. I would say to be careful since if you lose all your customers it's game over, but it's a moot point since you will lose all your extra lives way before that happens.

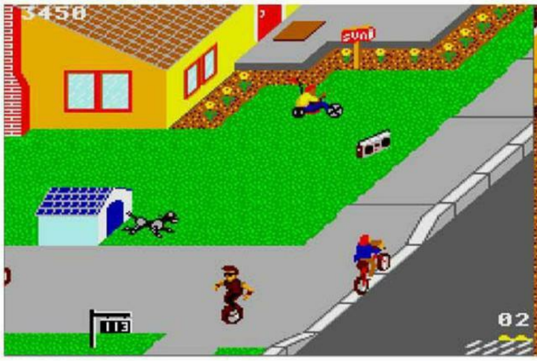
During your delivery day you have enough papers in reserve to toss a few through the windows of non-subscribers in a not so subtle attempt to show them what kind of quality publication they are missing out on. There are plenty of bundles laying about, so don't be afraid to give them several copies. At the end of each day you get the chance to show off your bike riding skills on a dirt BMX course. It's a nice way to take your mind off all the customers your lost that day because you missed their front porch with the paper.

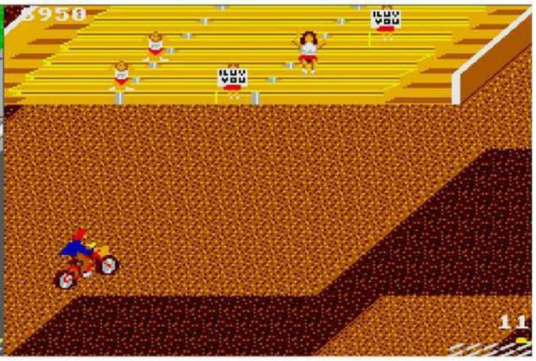


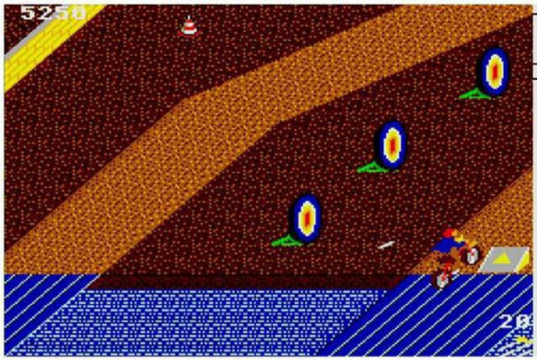


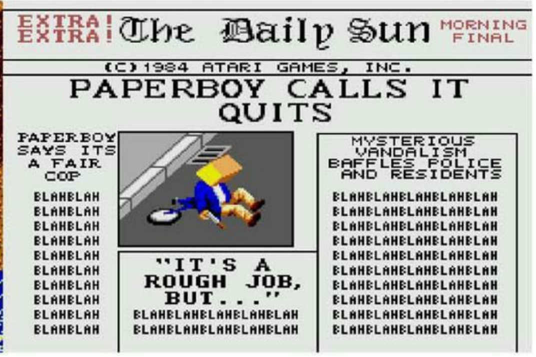












EXTRA! EXTRA! The Daily Sun MORNING FINAL

(C) 1984 ATARI GAMES, INC.

PAPERBOY CALLS IT QUITS

PAPERBOY SAYS ITS A FAIR COP

BLAHBLAH
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"IT'S A ROUGH JOB, BUT..."

BLAHBLAHBLAHBLAHBLAH
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MYSTERIOUS VANDALISM BAFFLES POLICE AND RESIDENTS

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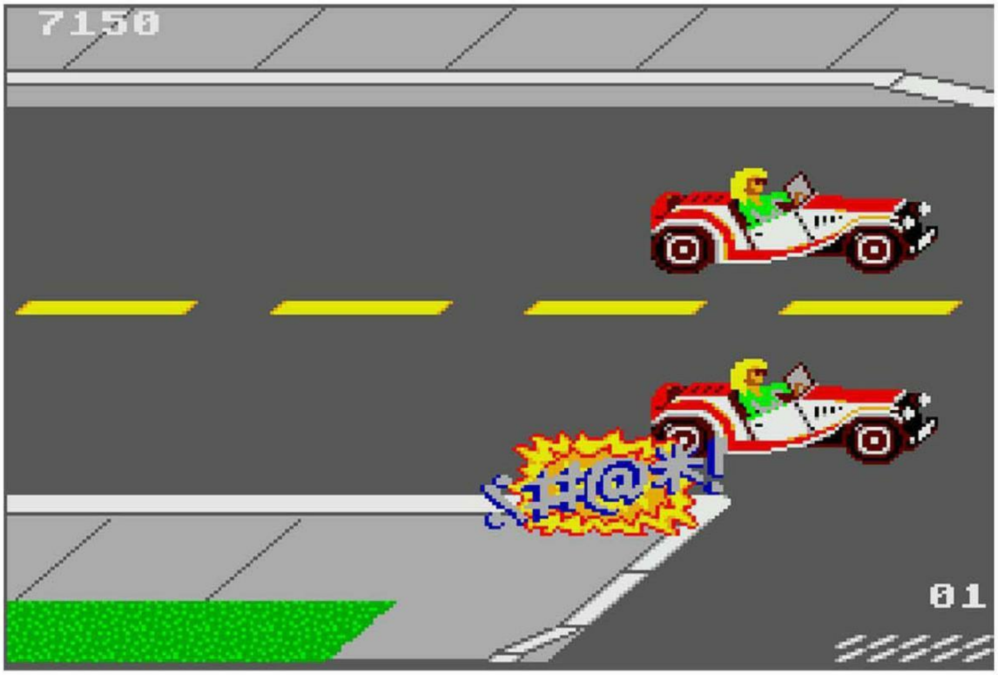
What sounds like an easy task is actually quite far from it, thanks to virtually everyone and everything in the neighborhood having you in their sights. There are everything from dogs to break dancers to kids on big wheels to guys on unicycles. Oh, and be careful when crossing the intersections because there is an army of rich ladies driving convertibles that cost more than you will make in a decade who have no regard for your health or well being.

There are a multitude of problems with this port. The first one you will notice happens as soon as you boot the game up. The music is so ear splittingly terrible that if you survive more than ten seconds of it without having the urge to kill the sound then you are a stronger person than I. Another big problem is the collision detection. It is way too easy to misjudge a curb or an obstacle and send your paperboy tumbling over the handlebars and to the ground. To pour salt in the wound, there are often much needed bundles of papers placed directly next to something that can kill you.

All of those problems pale in comparison to what is an unforgivable sin. A large part of the joy found in Paperboy is the ability to rain holy terror down upon the neighborhood by breaking and knocking over anything and everything. In the arcade (and even the NES port) you can break windows, knock over tombstones, hit robbers, send trash cans flying, and a whole host of other things. In this port however you can occasionally break a window. That's it. Every other time you hit something that should break or get knocked over your paper just falls to the ground with a thud. It really takes a lot of the fun out of the game.

Out of the 8-Bit ports, the SMS version is by far the lesser of the two. That said you should play it for no other reason than to be reminded of a worse time in our civilization when people had to rely on a teenager to bring them printed paper in order to find out what was going on in the world rather than simply taking a break from watching cat videos on youtube to check out a new site.

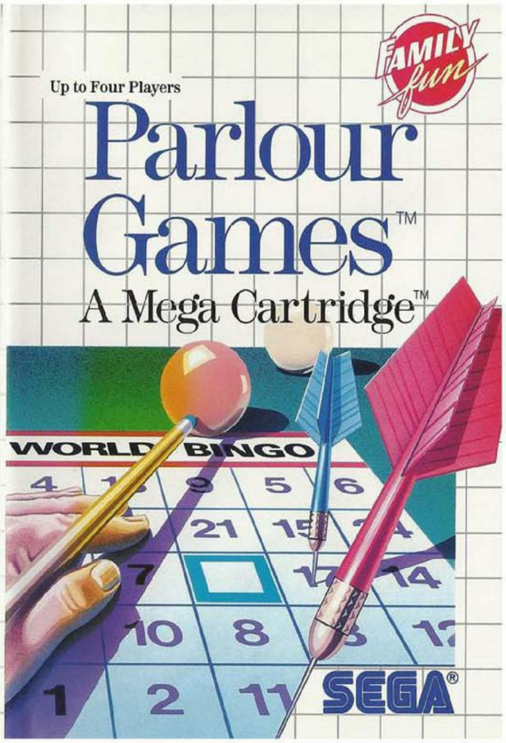


PARLOUR GAMES

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Misc Games
Players: 1 - 4

Parlour
Games

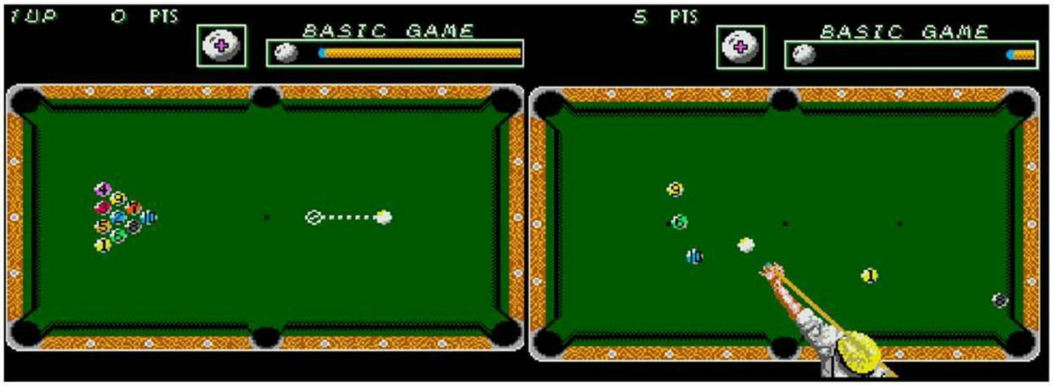

Up to Four Players
Parlour
Games™
A Mega Cartridge™
FAMILY fun
WORLD BINGO
SEGA®

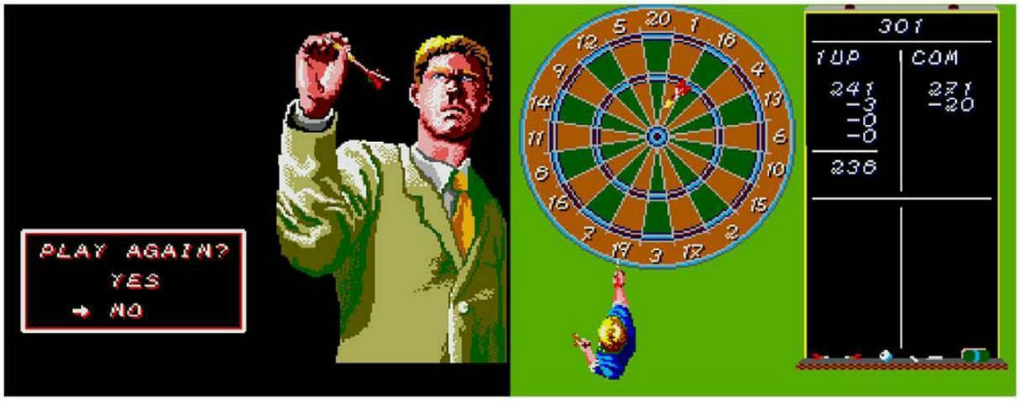
Parlour Games is a great introduction for kids into the wonderful world of bar games.

After being greeted at the door by some scantily clad women, you get your choice of a trio of traditional bar games. Well two traditional bar games in billiards and darts, and one from out of left field called world bingo. After selecting your game you can choose the number of players (depending on the game it can be 1-4 or just versus the computer). If you are facing off against the computer you get to pick from amateur and professional difficulty. After that you are off to the races.

Billiards comes in four different varieties. There is the basic game, which is where you try and sink all of your balls before calling your shot on the eight ball. Nine ball which forces you to hit the lowest numbered ball before hitting any others, with the winner sinking the nine ball. Five ball is essentially cutthroat where you select either high or low balls and attempt to sink your opponents balls before they can sink yours. And the final game is one called rotation, which is the deepest of the varieties present.

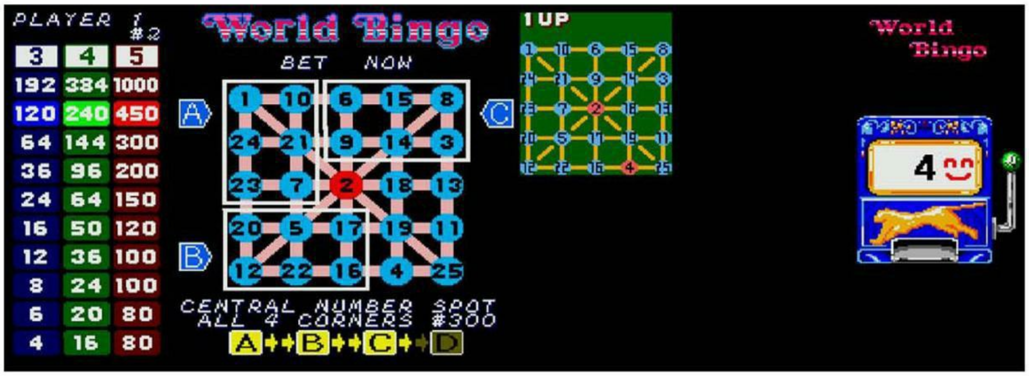
In rotation you have the same rule from nine ball where you always have to hit the lowest numbered ball left on the table, however instead of just trying to sink it so you can have a shot at the final ball, your goal is to get as many points as you can. Points are assigned to each ball (so if you sink the four ball you get four points, if you sink the ten ball you get ten, and so forth), and the winner is whoever reaches the point goal which is set before the match begins. The controls, aiming, and power meter functions are all spot on and rival that of some standalone billiards games from the era.





Once you are finished with billiards it's time to move over to the dart board. Like billiards there are several different varieties. The 301/501 games are simple "who can hit the exact number first", whereas round the clock challenges you to hit numbers 1-10 in order. Double down is a more difficult and convoluted game that requires you to hit specific numbers and occasionally hit doubles or triples (the small bards on the numbers for the uninitiated). There is also a complicated scoring system in place here that rewards you for hitting the numbers you are supposed to and punishes you if you fail. Regardless, the player with the highest score wins.

The controls for darts takes a little getting used to. When it's your turn your video game instincts will take over and you'll tap the button to confirm, which unfortunately means you are about to throw an errant dart. For some reason as soon as you hit the button your power meter starts going up, and since your next instinct will be to hit the button again your aim is going to be way off. After you apologize to the digital bar patron for putting their eye out you'll get the hang of how the controls work. When it's your turn you have to hold the button down to charge your power meter, and after letting go your aim meter starts moving which requires another button press. It's an unorthodox way of doing things, but once you figure it out you'll be hitting bulls-eyes in no time.



The final game is called world bingo, and it's a cross between the traditional bingo game and some sort of demented slot machine. At the beginning you start wagering how much money you want to risk on this round, which like a slot machine ups your potential winnings, but it also unlocks certain features. When you hit certain thresholds boxes begin to appear on your bingo card, as well as the center number occasionally lighting up red. During the game you have the opportunity to shuffle your card to try and line up the numbers that have been pulled in an attempt to make the longest line possible, although you can only do this during the first part of the game.

Instead of the numbers being pulled like they are in your garden variety bingo game, here there is a slot machine that has two parts, the numbers and creepy faces. Once the number portion of the slot stops the faces will keep spinning showing a red smily face and a blue frowny face. If the red face pops up that number will light up on your card, if it's blue you get to spin again. This goes on for a while, and for as long as I tried I could not figure out if there is a cap on spins or the number of lit numbers. Regardless, you will have to get very lucky to get even three numbers in a row, let alone five.

This is a really solid collection of bar games, so if you are looking for a bar simulator without the choking smoke or the annoying drunks, Parlour Games isn't a bad way to go.

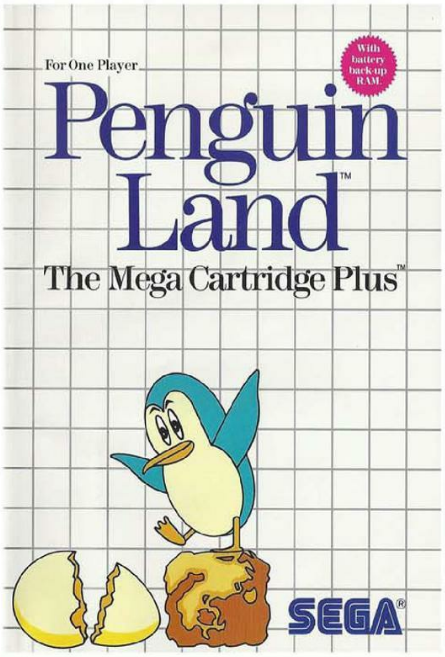
PENGUIN LAND

Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Puzzle
Players: 1

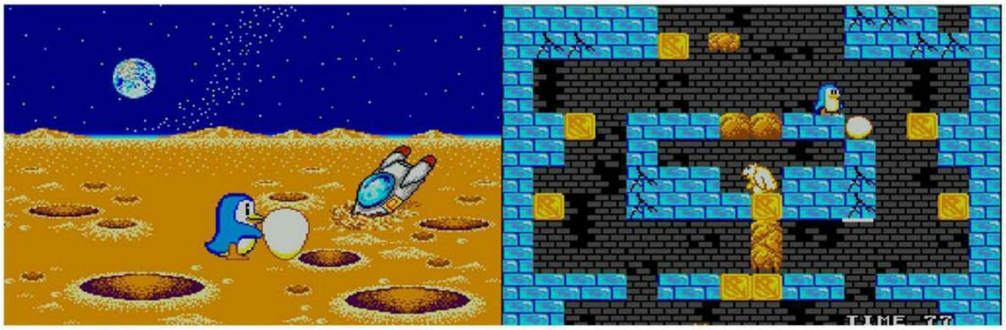
PENGUIN
LAND

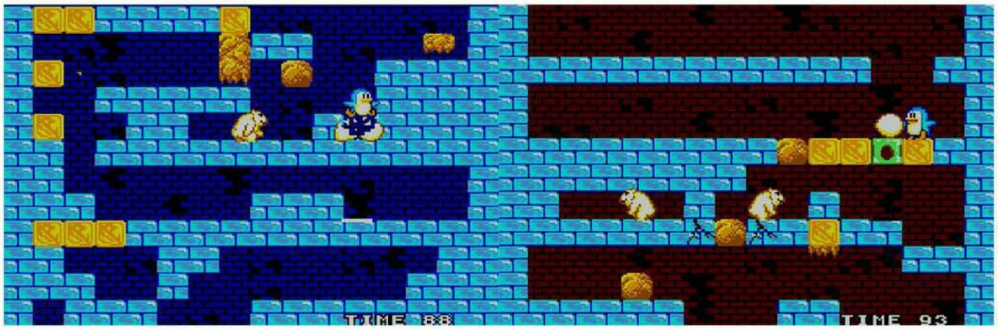
Penguin Land is a charming but ridiculously difficult puzzle game that will drive casual gamers to throw the controller in frustration.

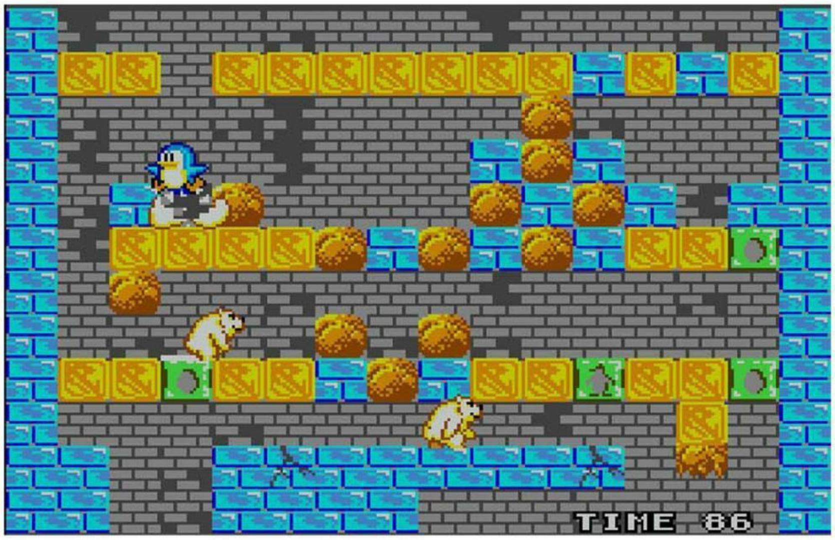

For One Player
With battery back-up RAM
Penguin Land™
The Mega Cartridge Plus™
SEGA®

The basic premise is simple, you are in control of a mama space penguin who has accidentally dropped her egg down a crater on the moon and have to dig through an elaborate series of ice caverns in order to safely reach her space ship. Given the fragility of the egg and the large number of dangers facing its survival this game is somewhat of a historical reenactment as to how the race of space penguins went extinct.

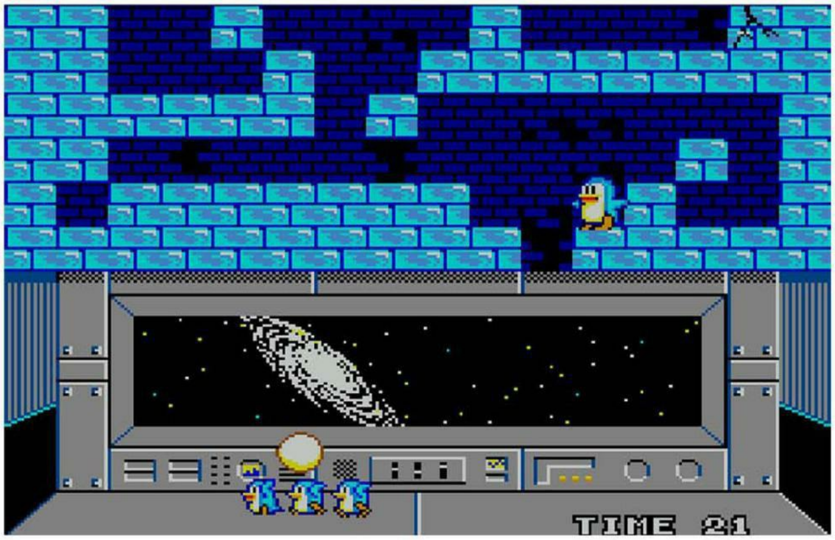
At the start of each level you are at the top of an ice cavern with your ship way, way below you. In order to get your egg there you have to strategically remove blocks of ice below your egg so it will land safely on the lower level of ice. You must be careful however since if your egg drops too far it will break. Or if it gets hit by space polar bears it will break. Or if you accidentally step on it when it has nowhere to roll it will break. Expect to see your egg splattered on the ground below you a lot, especially early on.

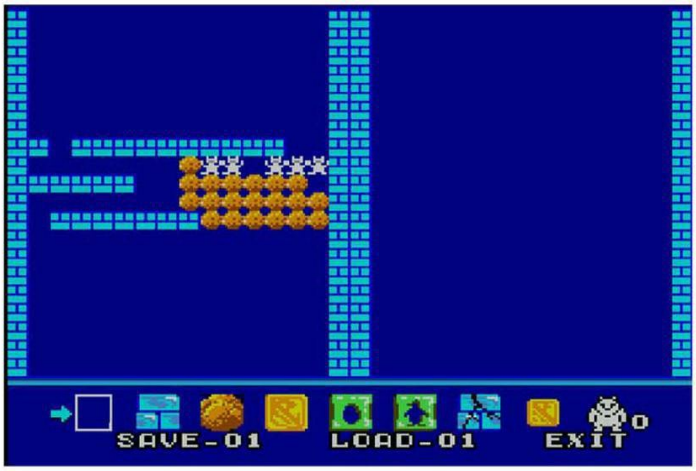






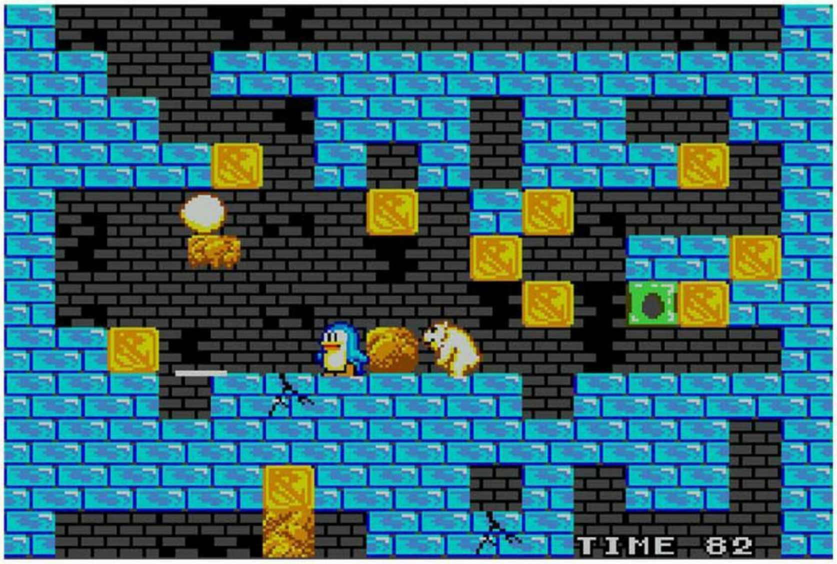
The mama penguin is limited as far as what type of blocks she can destroy. For starters the blocks must be adjacent to the one she is on, as she can't break the one she's standing on. This means that you will have to plan your moves out far in advance of actually doing them since if you aren't careful the egg will become stuck with no way to dislodge it. There are also plenty of blocks she can't break, like wooden ones, and others that will cause you headaches like the ice blocks that break when the egg is on top of it or the moving platforms that must be utilized if you are to finish the level. Oh, and not to add any pressure or anything, but there is a time limit on each stage as well.





While the game looks cute, the puzzles will quickly take you out for a behind the woodshed type beating. Even the first level requires several playthroughs before figuring out the correct path to take. They say you have to break a few eggs in order to make an omelet...given the amount of broken eggs you will encounter in this game here's hoping that you are one hungry game player. And if the thirty enclosed levels weren't enough to keep your puzzle loving mind happy, Penguin Land also includes a level editor so that you can create your own devious Penguin related puzzles.

If you are looking for a challenging puzzle game, or if you just have a thing for space penguins, this is worth a look. If you are looking for a casual gaming experience look elsewhere.



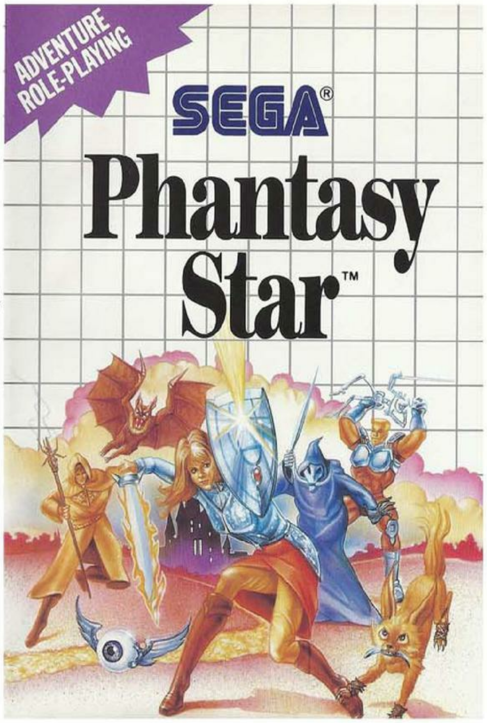
PHANTASY STAR

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: RPG
Players: 1

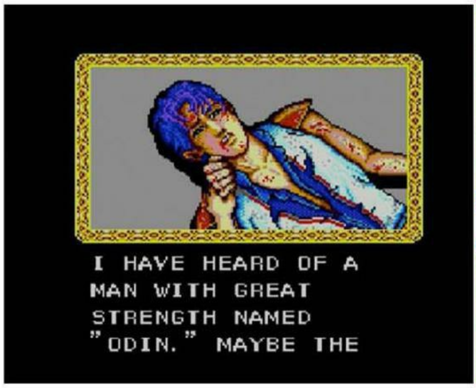
PHANTASY
STAR
START
CONTINUE

Phantasy Star is a deep, robust, and insanely challenging sci-fi infused RPG.


ADVENTURE
ROLE-PLAYING
SEGA®
Phantasy
Star™

You control Alis, an adventurous young woman who watches in horror as her brother Nero is beaten to death by troops loyal to Lassic. With his dying breath he says that she needs to seek out the strongman Odin to help defeat the evil that plagues the land. And with that Alis is off to the races, if by races you mean small incremental steps to build herself up enough to survive the harsh world outside the city walls.

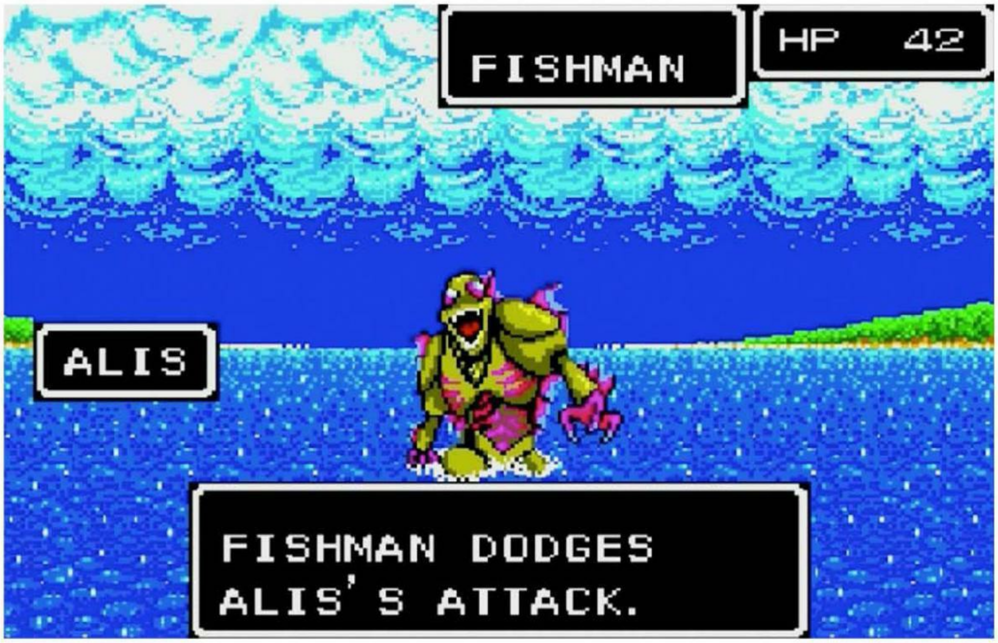
To say Phantasy Star is difficult would be an understatement. There aren't too many RPGs in existence where your very first enemy encounter can end your game. If you want to have any hope of survival whatsoever you are going to have to hope and pray that your first dozen or so fights come against the weakest enemy, the swarm (which is nothing more than an overgrown bee). Once you spend a bit of time smacking them down you'll finally be able to afford some better equipment, and ultimately be able to face off against tougher opponents.



I HAVE HEARD OF A
MAN WITH GREAT
STRENGTH NAMED
"ODIN." MAYBE THE

YOU MAY NOT PASS.

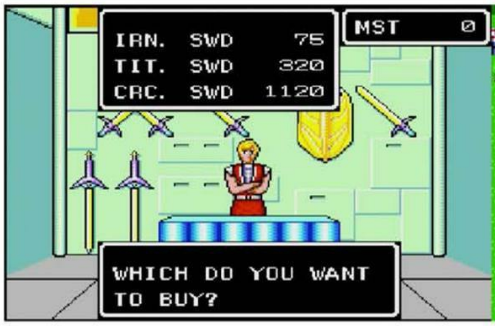
PROTECT ME, NERO!



FISHMAN DODGES
ALIS'S ATTACK.

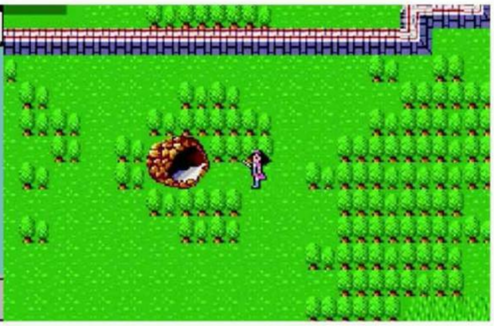
The battles are all random encounters, but thankfully they are spread out a bit. It's possible to walk from the first town to the second town and only get into two or three battles. Granted this does make level grinding much more infuriating since you are forced to walk in circles for what seems like days before getting into a fight, but over the long haul it is a plus rather than a minus.

Speaking of towns, there are plenty of things to do there. Of course there are shops that sell you goods, and good citizens wandering the streets who will give you words of encouragement, but there are also homes that contain everything from clues to gifts to a healer who will replenish your health. It's vital that these houses are inspected thoroughly because without their items and information it is not only impossible to progress in the game, but impossible to find the other members of your party.



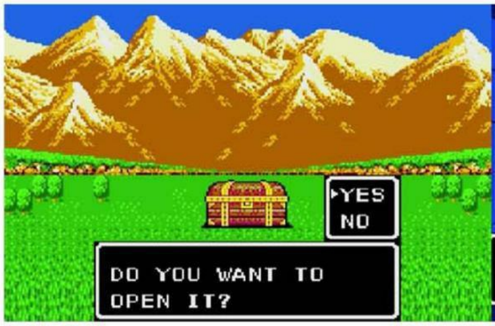
IRN. SWD 75
TIT. SWD 320
CRC. SWD 1120

WHICH DO YOU WANT TO BUY?

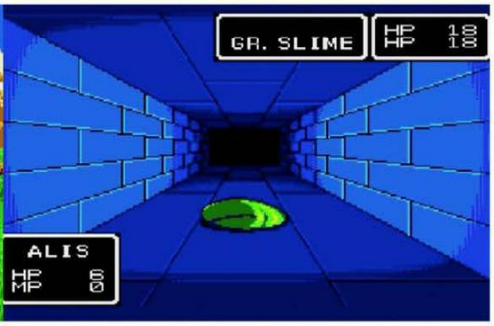


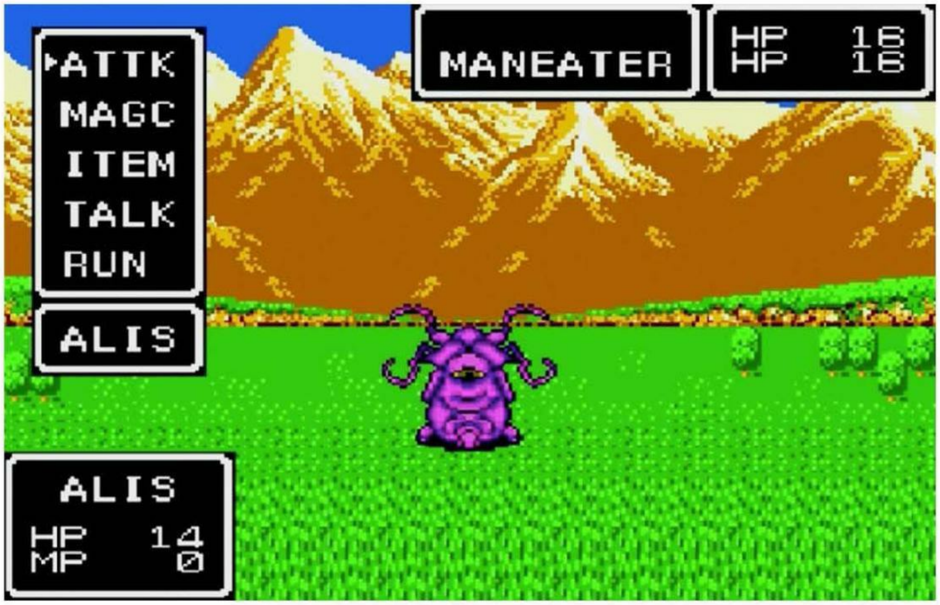
In addition to Alis there are three more recruits to your cause, consisting of a strongman, a magician, and a sentient cat. Not much time is devoted to their backstory or character development, since for the most part the citizens speak at you not with you, but they are welcome additions nonetheless.

While the towns and over world are viewed from the top down perspective, the dungeons are first person. This is a double edged sword as it is nice to change things up, and the first person perspective is done very very well, but it ramps up the difficulty to an insane level. The first few dungeons are fairly easy and possible to feel your way through, after that however if you want to prevent yourself from spending eternity roaming endless hallway after endless hallway, you should invest in a pack of graphing paper (or cheat and use the internet).



DO YOU WANT TO OPEN IT?





There are a ton of different normal enemies (bees, creepy cyclops owls, giant fish men), as well as a handful of difficult boss fights. The normal enemies can get a bit overwhelming thanks to the fact that there can be an entire gang of them. To make matters worse, you don't have any control over which one in the stack your party attacks, so you just have to sit back and hope that they gang up on one at a time rather than spreading their attacks out.

Everything about this game is top notch. The graphics are arguably the best of the era, the music is memorable, and the gameplay will keep you hooked for hours. Yes there is a fair amount of grinding that needs to be done, but given that there is always some shiny new weapon to buy you'll find yourself saying "well, maybe just one more fight".

Phantasy Star is the first console RPG to take the genre out of the middle ages and into the distant future. When you add that into the rest of what the game has to offer and you have yourself a must play for anyone who enjoys RPG's, or really just games in general.

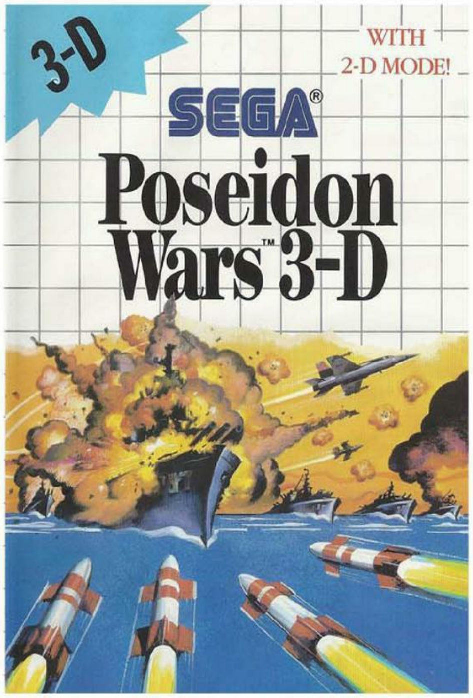
POSEIDON WARS 3-D

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Submarine
Players: 1

POSEIDON
START
WARS
3D

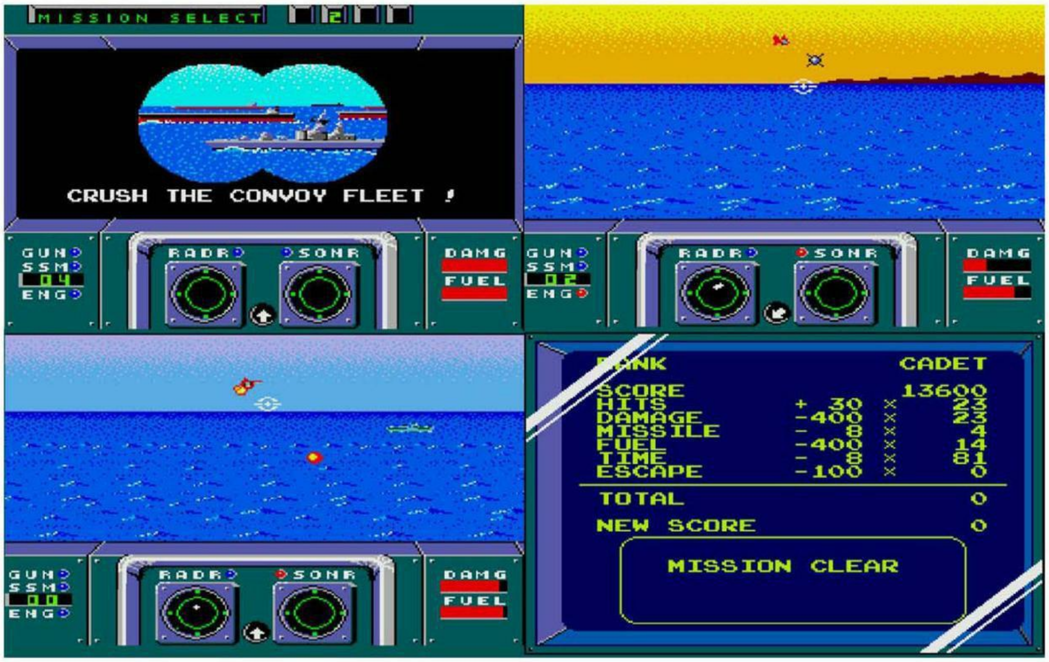
This is a nifty naval based shooter that takes advantage of the 3-D glasses.


3-D
WITH
2-D MODE!
SEGA®
Poseidon
Wars™ 3-D

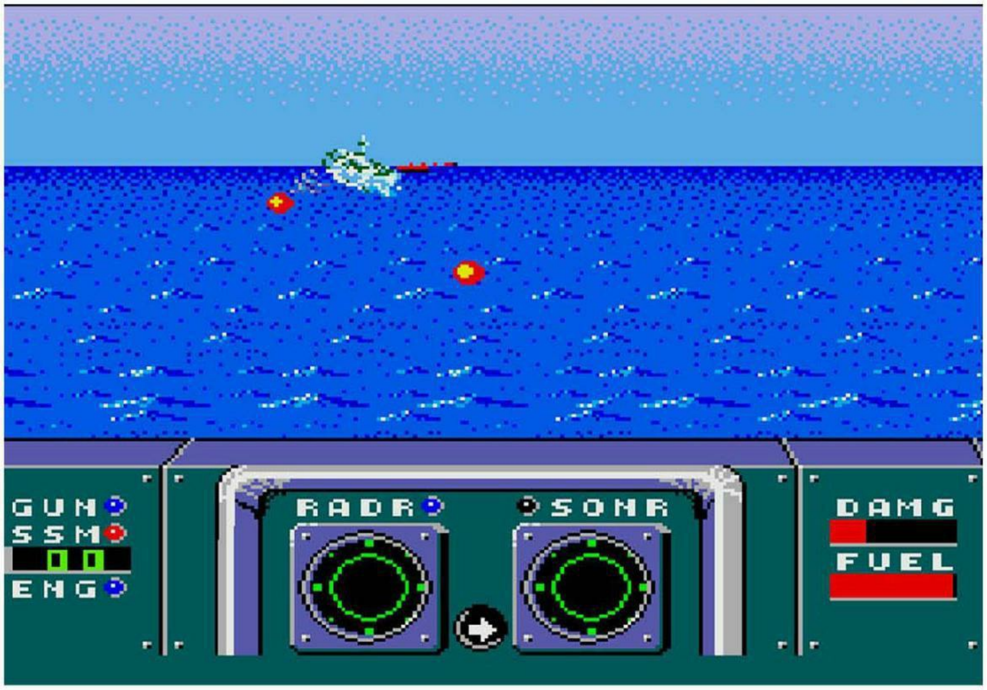
The basic premise of the game is simple, you are at the held of the USS Poseidon, and over the course of thirteen missions you are to blow up every single ship, plane, and helicopter that comes across your periscope. It's never established who your enemy is, but given the amount of firepower they are sending your way it's safe to assume they are well financed.

At the start you have four training missions that can be tackled in any order. These are fairly simple introductions to the game that has you doing everything from sinking a fleet of ships to recapturing a friendly port from the enemy. Once you survive the training it's on to the nine real missions.

For being a floating warship of death and destruction, you have a limited amount of firepower at your disposal. In addition to your machine gun you only get a handful of missiles that do massive damage (and by handful I mean like four. If you start out hitting the wrong fire button you'll be out of them before you realize what happened). Thankfully your machine gun packs a wallop, and never runs out of ammunition. The one frustrating thing however is that your crosshairs have a mind of their own. If you stop moving them for a second they will automatically reset to the center position which means you should expect to miss plenty of carefully lined up shots.



```
ANK                        CADET
SCORE                      13600
HITS        + 30  ×           23
DAMAGE      -400  ×           23
MISSILE     -  8  ×            4
FUEL        -400  ×           14
TIME        -  8  ×           81
ESCAPE      -100  ×            0
TOTAL                          0
NEW SCORE                      0
         MISSION CLEAR
```



You do have some tools that make your job a little bit easier. You have both sonar and radar which gives you a heads up to what is coming your way. This is especially useful since some enemies can fire at you before they appear on screen. Luckily you have a crack shot manning the machine gun as you can shoot the incoming missiles and torpedoes out of the sky and water respectively.

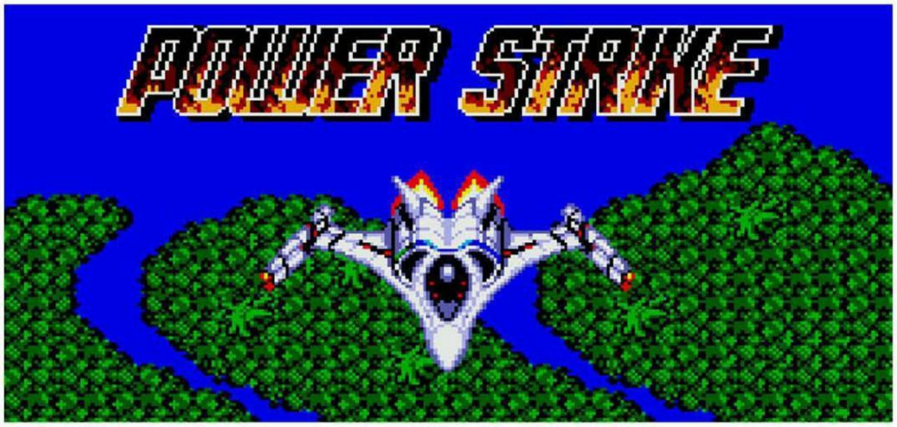
Poseidon Wars 3-D is a simple yet effective shooter, that thankfully has the ability to be played without the 3-D glasses, which is nice for those of us who didn't want to shell out fifty bucks just so we could pretend to be a naval commander.

(If you are having trouble figuring out how to turn off the 3-D, just hit button 1 on the second controller which will do the trick).

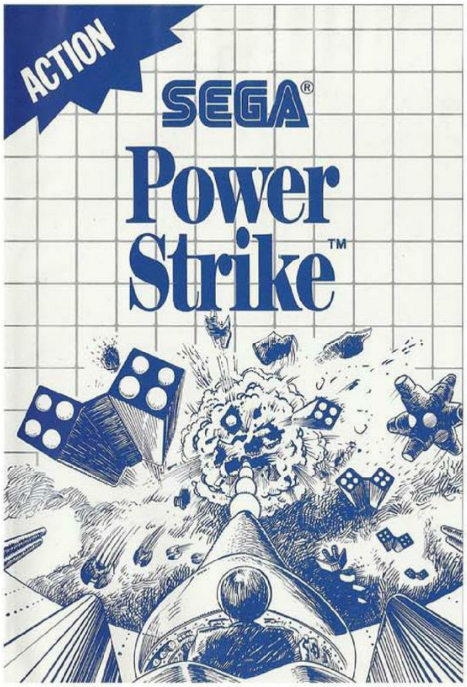
POWER STRIKE

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Compile
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Shmup
Players: 1

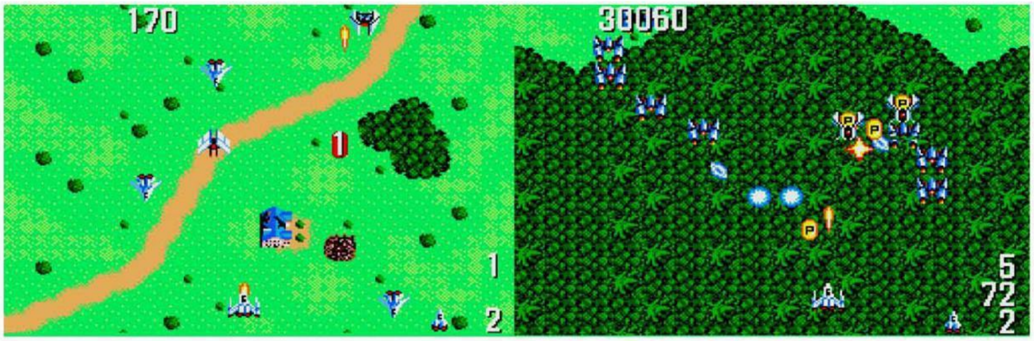

POWER STRIKE

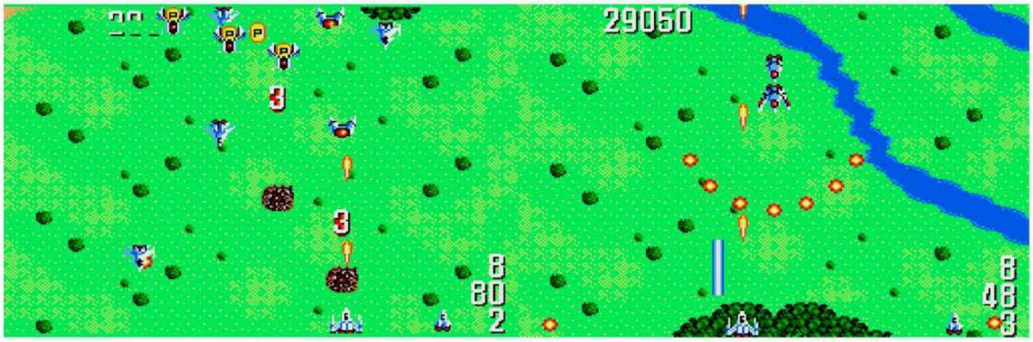
Power Strike is not only a robust shmup, it is one of the rarest Master System games to boot.

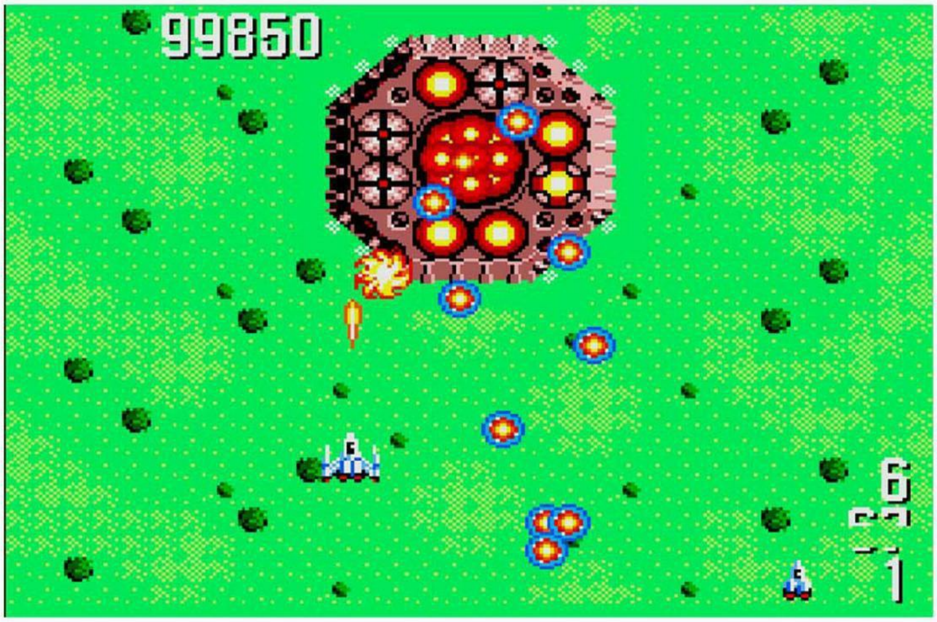

ACTION
SEGA®
Power
Strike™

The story is pretty much a carbon copy of every other game in this genre. You control a heavily armed ship tasked with destroying an alien force that have overrun the Earth, which means you will have to fire an incalculable number of bullets, dodge an even greater number of them, and of course defy the one in a billion odds that are against you. Thankfully you have some things that can help you out in this endeavor.

In addition to your standard pea shooter, you can grab eight different secondary weapons which helps to level the playing field. Scattered about are numbers 1-8, which corresponds with the powered up weaponry. You start out with a multi-directional blue fireball shot, but you can upgrade to anything from spinning forcefields to wave blasters to devastating laser beams.

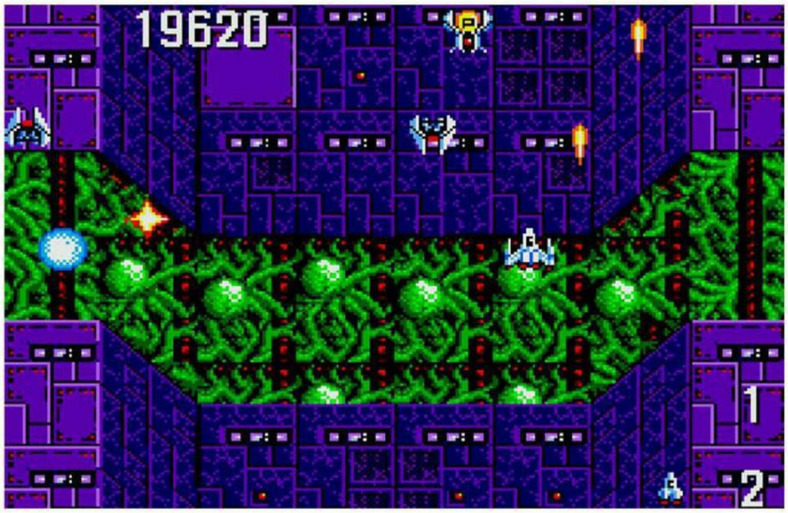






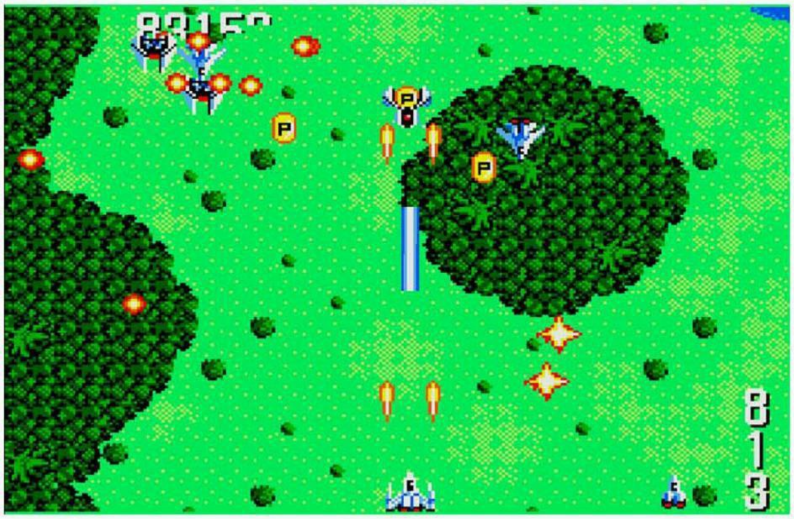
One of the downsides to these weapons is that they have a limited use to them, of course the upside is that for most players they will last long enough since you'll probably be long dead before the ammo runs out. The other problem is that when the number is released from the ship or container they are in, they will rapidly float up to the top of the screen instead of making their way down towards your ship. If you aren't aiming carefully and shoot them when they are close to your ship, you will either have to watch helplessly as they vanish off the top of the screen or go on a near suicide run to grab them.

In addition to the secondary weapons you can also pick up pill shaped items with a giant P on them, which powers up your primary weapon provided you collect enough of them. Eventually you will get two then three bullets firing from your main gun, which when coupled with your secondary weapon turns your ship into a flying fortress of doom. Of course if you happen to get hit by one of the multitude of bullets flying at you and have to take advantage of an extra life you will be reduced back to your starting weaponry. Unless you die very early on in a level it is very difficult to recover from dying since the challenge only grows as you progress.



As one would expect, there are tons of things to shoot and destroy here. There are a large variety of ships, stationary bases, and kamikazes that are all out to get you. And of course there are giant bosses to contend with, most of whom are heavily armed bases that will throw everything including the kitchen sink at you. When it comes to the enemies there is nothing that hasn't been seen before, although everything here is quite solid.

If you are a diehard fan of the shmup genre this is worth checking out, however if you are a casual player only looking to play the best of the best, there are better ones out there.



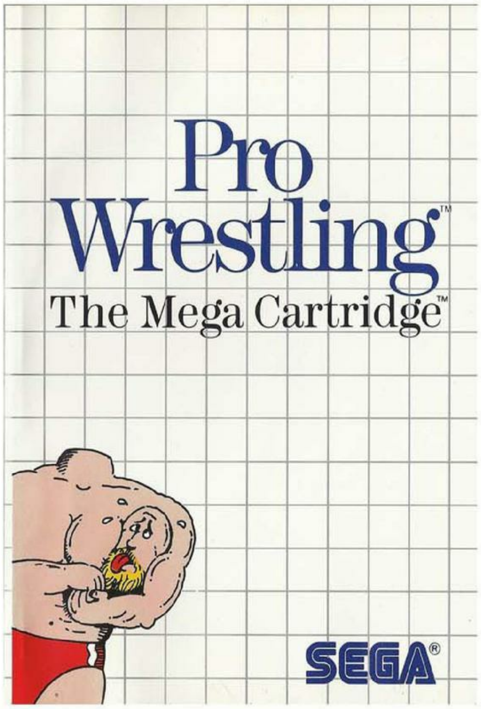
PRO WRESTLING

Release Date: 1986
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Sports - Wrestling
Players: 1 - 2

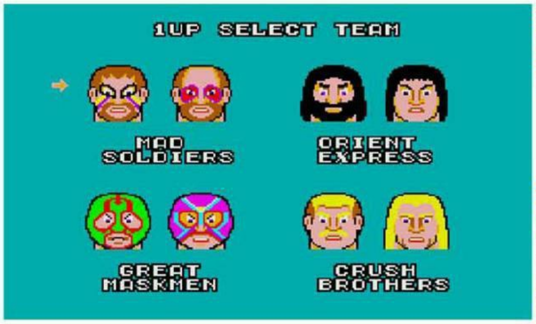
PRO
WRESTLING
PUSH 1 PLAY START BUTTON
OR
PUSH 2 PLAY START BUTTON
© SEGA 1986

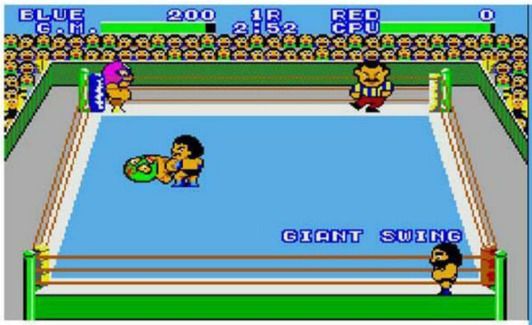
Pro Wrestling is a simplistic and straightforward tag team based wrestling game.

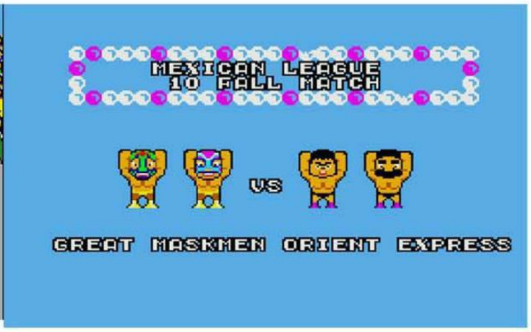

Pro
Wrestling™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

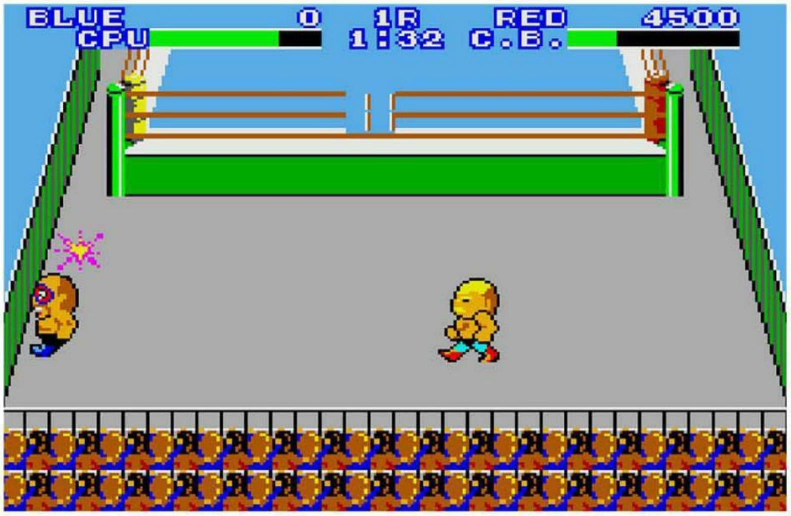
At the start you get your choice between four different tag teams. The Mad Soldiers are warpaint wearing beasts, the Orient Express aren't exactly asian, the Crash Brothers are the Hulk Hoganesque team, and the Great Maskmen pay homage to the long tradition of masked Mexican wrestlers. Outside of a couple of unique special moves, all four teams play identically.

Once you pick your team you are off to the Mexican Wrestling League, where you face off against a computer controlled team in a ten fall match. For those of you who aren't familiar with the lingo of pro wrestling, a ten fall match means you must defeat your opponent ten times before you can move on. This can be accomplished by pinning them, or getting a 20 count when they are outside the ring. Either way you go about it, reaching ten wins is incredibly tedious. If you do happen to win you'll move up to the Pacific and World League, but I doubt many people will have the stamina or interest to sit through a minimum of thirty matches to attain the ultimate victory.

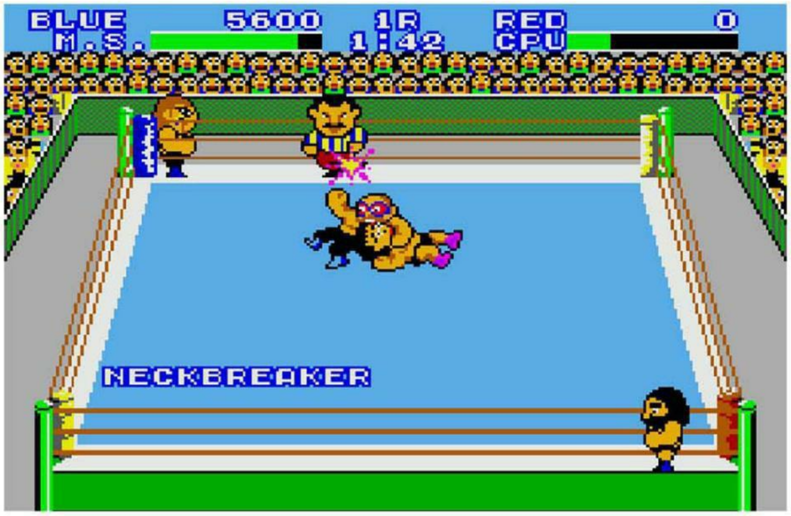

1UP SELECT TEAM
MAD SOLDIERS
ORIENT EXPRESS
GREAT MASKMEN
CRUSH BROTHERS

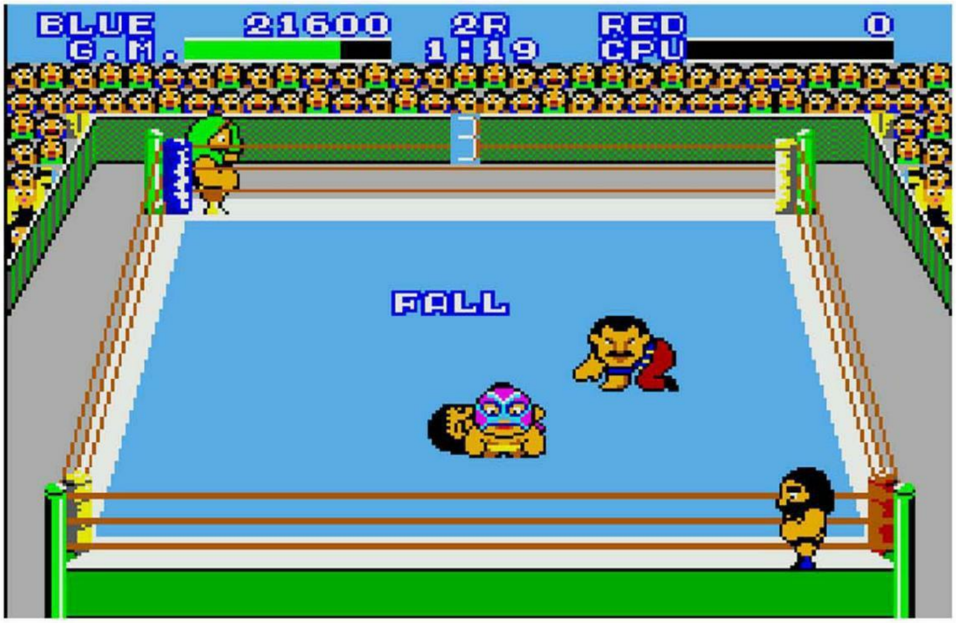

BLUE G.M.
200
1R 2:52
RED CPU
0
GIANT SWING


MEXICAN LEAGUE
10 FALL MATCH
VS
GREAT MASKMEN
ORIENT EXPRESS



After a simple intro where the teams walk into the arena before showing off their crazy jumping skills by leaping over the top rope and into the ring from the ground, the match begins. The first thing you'll notice is that your characters look like midgets in the ring, and while a midget wrestling game would totally rule, this unfortunately doesn't quite get there. The other thing that will garner your attention is that with every blow that lands, the type of attack will pop up at the bottom of the ring. I could somewhat understand this for the special moves, but it gets really tiring to continually have the words "Punch" and "Kick" pop up every two seconds like it's an episode of Batman from the 1960s.





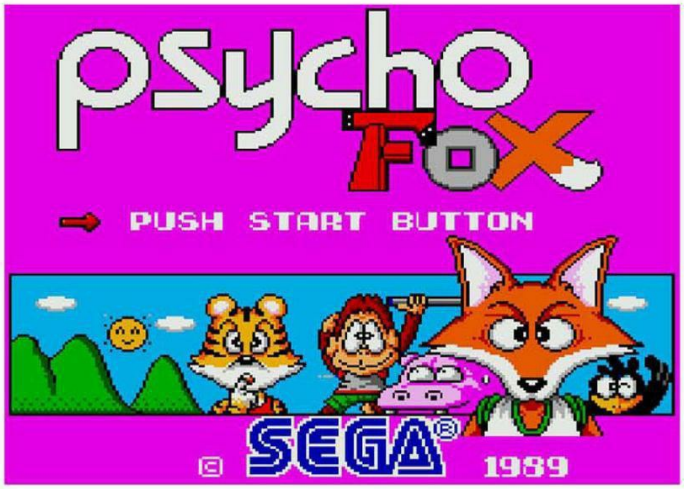
The fights have a certain flow to them that causes the match to devolve into nothing but a series of timed button presses. Basically you walk up to your opponent, and the first one to land two blows knocks the other one down. While on the ground a special move can be triggered, which consists of throwing the opponent against the ropes and a brutal attack follows. These attacks range from karate kicks to flying jump kicks to the cheap neck breaker. The neck breaker pretty much breaks the game since after successfully executing it your opponent stays on the ground for a few moments, allowing you to do the same move again. Thankfully it isn't an endless cycle, and that after two or three times the computer stands up immediately after falling, but by the time that happens half the health is gone.

As you can imagine, the game gets quite dull quite quickly. Even the referee knows this is a boring game as he tries to entertain you by doing an impromptu River Dance along the back of the ring. If you like wrestling there are better options out there, even in the 8-Bit era.

PSYCHO FOX

Release Date: 1989
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

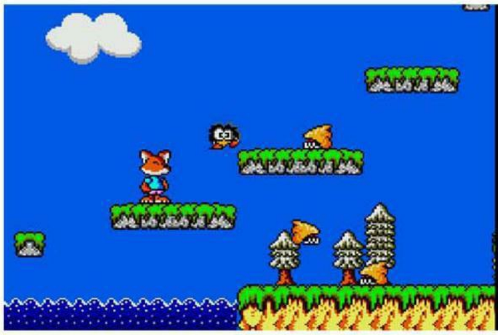
Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1

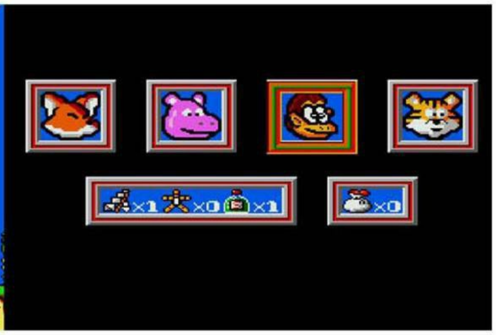

psycho
Fox
PUSH START BUTTON
© SEGA® 1989

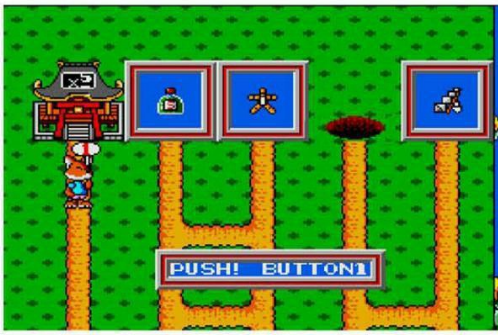
Psycho Fox puts you in the role of an animal morphing fox who is charged with the task of defeating an evil fox god in order to restore the world to its previous glory. This is easier said than done however.

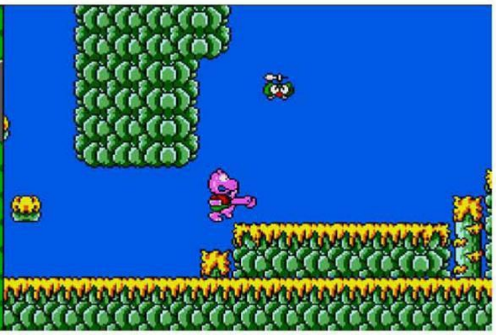
ACTION
SEGA®
Psycho Fox™

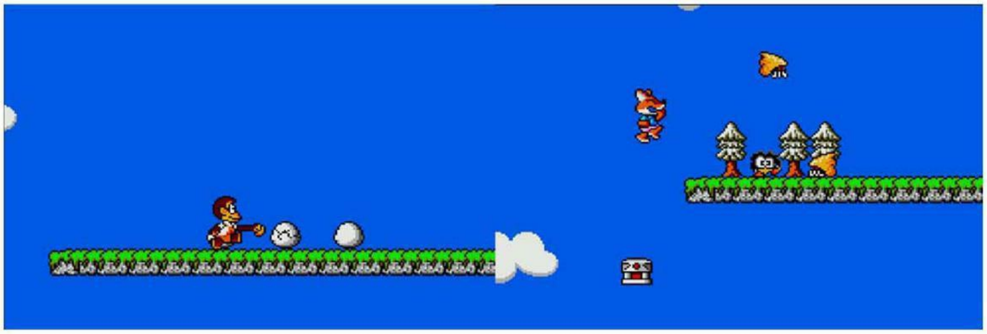
The most unique play mechanic here is the fact that once a special item is acquired the Psycho Fox can morph into one of three other animals, all with their own unique abilities. The Fox is a generally well rounded character and doesn't really stand out in any way. The Monkey is the highest jumper of the group, while the Tiger is the fastest. And finally we have the weakest alter ego, the Hippo, who despite having the ability to break blocks is all but useless thanks to the fact he is by far the slowest and has almost no jumping ability. And despite the fact that these are some of the more powerful creatures mother nature has to offer, if they even so much as get breathed on by a snail, they die. This is where the game begins to fall apart.









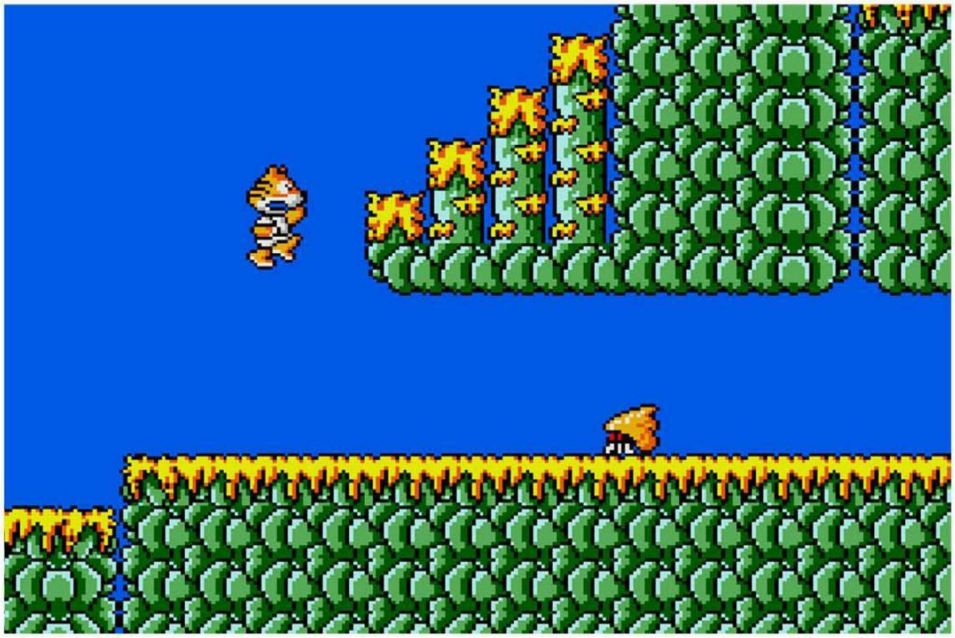


Like a lot of games in this genre, Psycho Fox has one hit deaths. Unlike a lot of other games in this genre, there are no checkpoints throughout the level, meaning if you die within eyesight of the finish line, you have to start all the way back at the beginning. This is even true when you are fighting a boss. Think you are going to start off a few feet from that encounter? Think again. And it's not like these stages are short, there are a thousand ways to die along the way, including probably the most confusing way possible, drowning in a foot of water. Even the hippo dies in the water despite spending the better part of its life soaking in the stuff. But even that would be forgivable if the jump wasn't completely broken.

For some reason they designers decided to employ a realistic jump, which frankly doesn't work for this type of game. In virtually every other platformer in existence, if you are six inches away from another block it should be no problem reaching it by jumping. Not in Psycho Fox, oh no. Unless you get up a head of steam all you will do is jump up, hang in the air long enough to float over the gap, and promptly fall to your death in the foot of water below you. On the other side of that coin, if you have a full head of steam and jump (and you are the monkey or the tiger) expect to overshoot your preferred landing zone by about half a screen. If you try to meticulously work your way through the level you will die repeatedly, but if you just leave it up to fate, get to the highest point and jump as far as you can, you might actually have a shot.

If you do decide to fight it out with the enemies, you do have some items that will help you in that endeavor. The most notable of which is the boomerang bird, which can not only be flung across the screen to take out enemies, but will also take one for the team and take your place in death if an enemy hits you. Also along the way you can pick up a stick man idol that will clear the screen of enemies, and an invisibility potion that will, well, make you invincible. Wait, scratch that, it will make you invincible everywhere except during the boss fight, which is kind of a downer. You can also pick up a coin bag which will allow you to place a bet after each stage for a chance to win items or extra lives. That is assuming of course you survive the level.

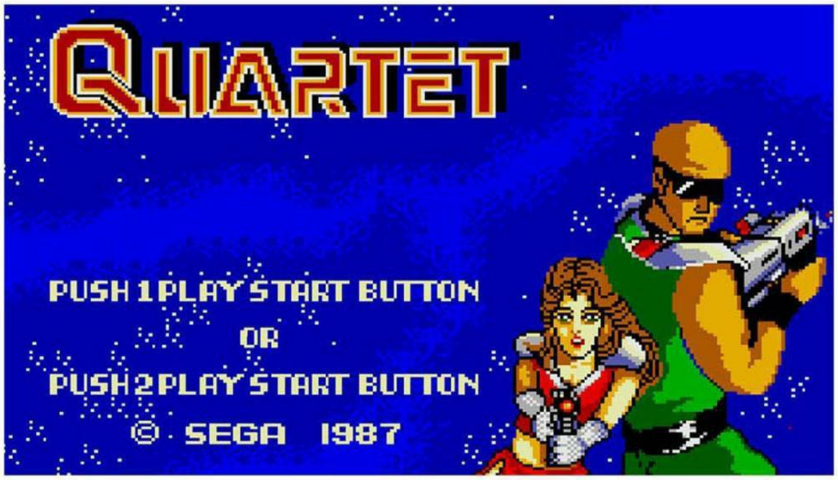
Problems aside, there are still a few good things about the game. The graphics and music are both above average for this era, plus it's always a treat to see a sharp dressed fox getting into a fist fight with a snail. So if you want to play a controller throwing in frustration level game that looks and sounds dandy, this isn't a bad way to go.



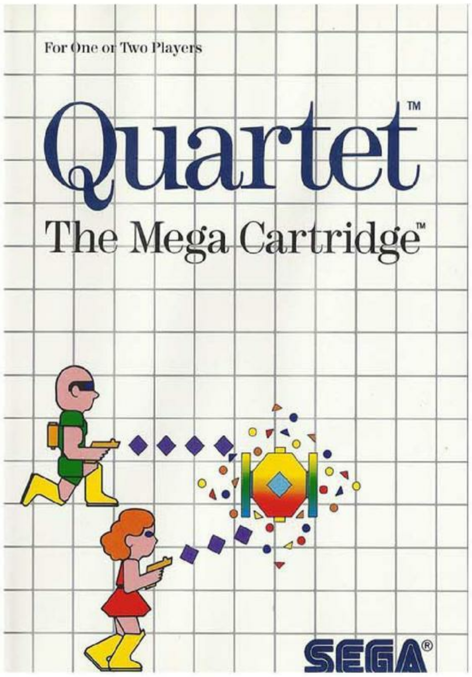
QUARTET

Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

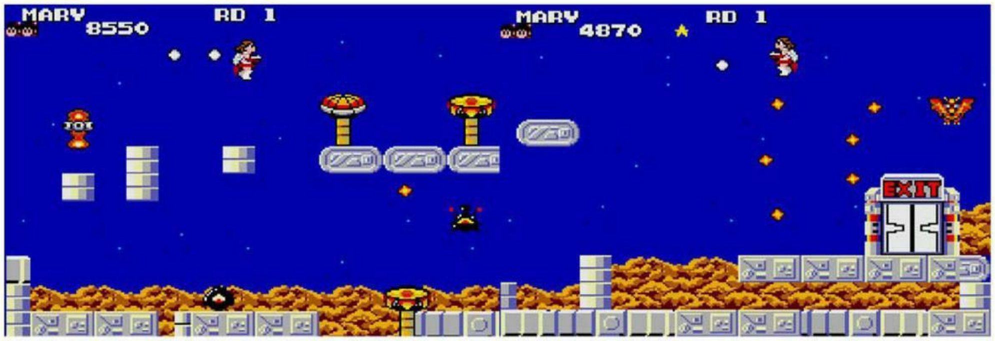
Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1 - 2

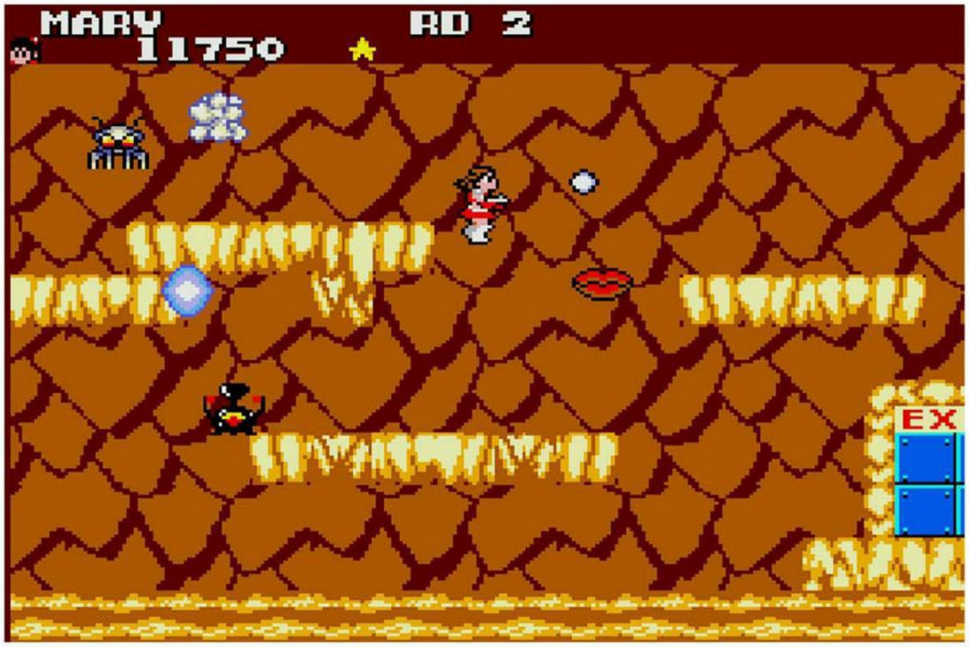

QUARTET
PUSH 1 PLAY START BUTTON
OR
PUSH 2 PLAY START BUTTON
© SEGA 1987

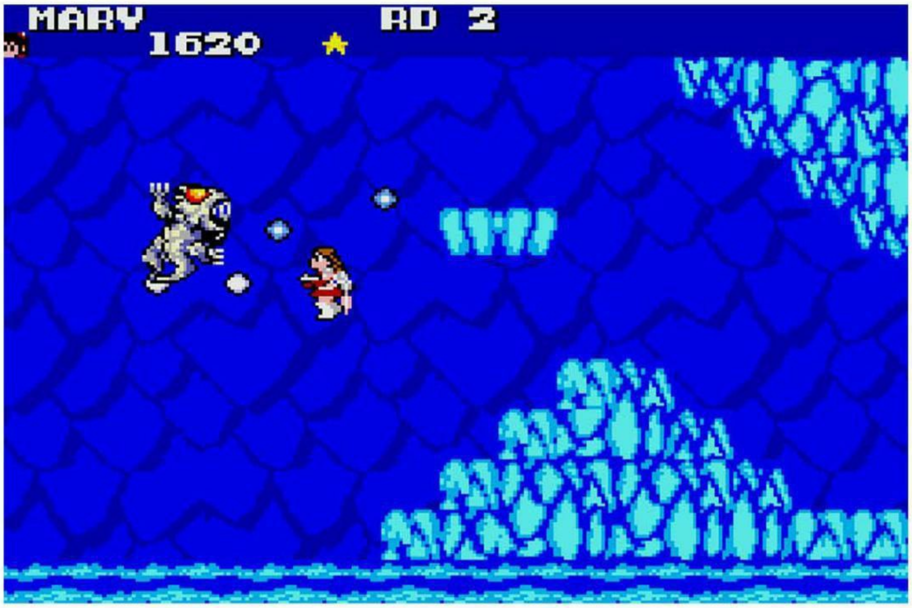
Quartet is an ironically named arcade port that even the most hardcore of players will never see the end of.


For One or Two Players
Quartet™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

As with most arcade to 8-Bit ports, sacrifices had to be made in order to make it fit within the confines of the technology. Normally it's small stuff like shortened levels, reduced graphics and the like, but here it defies the title entirely. In the arcade version four people could play at the same time with four distinctly different characters, whereas in this port only two can take up arms together. While it's understandable given that there was no multi-controller attachment that would have let four people play a game together on the Master System, but they even went so far as to remove the option to take control of the two additional characters. Granted it doesn't really detract from the overall gameplay experience, it's just a bit odd playing a game called Quartet with a duo.







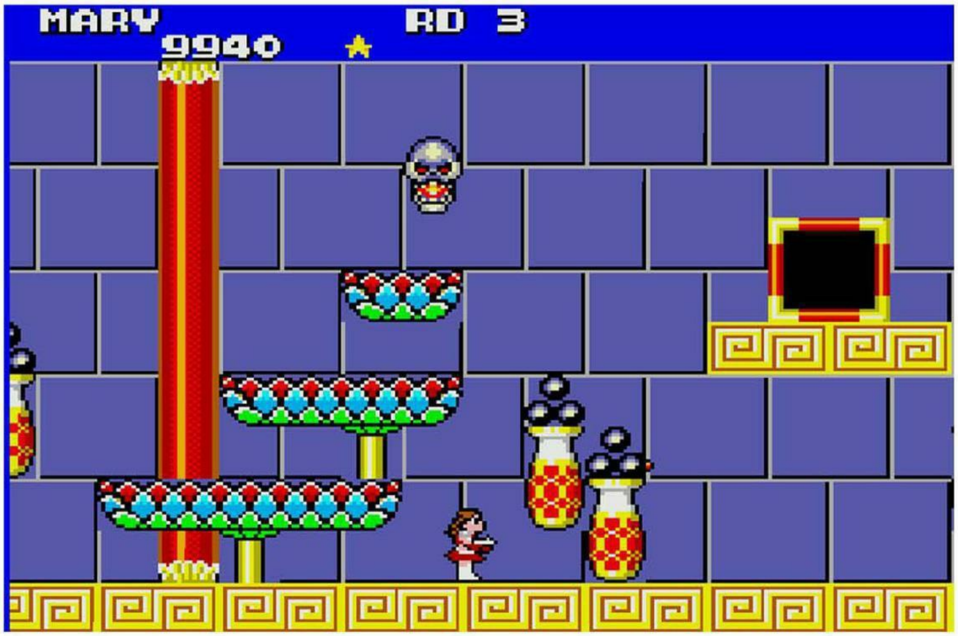
Each of the six levels play out in pretty much the same way. You must run through a gauntlet of constantly respawning enemies in order to track down a magical star and a key holding boss before using the exit to move on. The stars can be a pain to track down, and are mandatory if you want to make it to the sixth and final level, while the keys are an even bigger pain as you must defeat a boss in order to grab it. You don't really have a lot to help you out in your quest other than a jetpack that grants you free movement around the screen. This is nice until you get hit and plummet to the ground below. At least you better hope there is ground below you, because if you are over a bottomless pit it's an instant death.

The enemies are incredibly annoying, to put it mildly. They are quick, fire even quicker, and when you kill them it takes all of two seconds before they appear again to come at you. This wouldn't be the end of the world if it wasn't for the fact you don't have much health. OK, on the surface it looks like you do considering you start out with 10,000. But every step you take removes 10 from that number, and every time you take a hit it takes hundreds off. To make this situation even more dire, the bosses not only take a lot of damage, but they fire a ton of bullets.

And to pour salt in the wound, your gun doesn't have that much reach, so in order to beat them and get the key you are going to have to get up close and personal, which means you will take damage. If you make it through the exit you will get a health boost, but it's not really enough to make much of a dent as the higher the level number, the more enemies that show up.

Aside from the two missing members of your quartet, there are additional issues. The most troubling is the fact that there are no continues (at least none that are easily found. To put it mildly this makes finishing the game nearly impossible. The enemies are fairly generic and forgettable, consisting mostly of robots, skeleton heads, and fireball throwing eye bases. The one enemy that is a head scratcher is a giant set of lips that looks like they are straight out of Rocky Horror. Apparently space is a confusing and terrifying place.

While not a terrible port of the arcade game, this is certainly a forgettable experience, even for fans of the original.



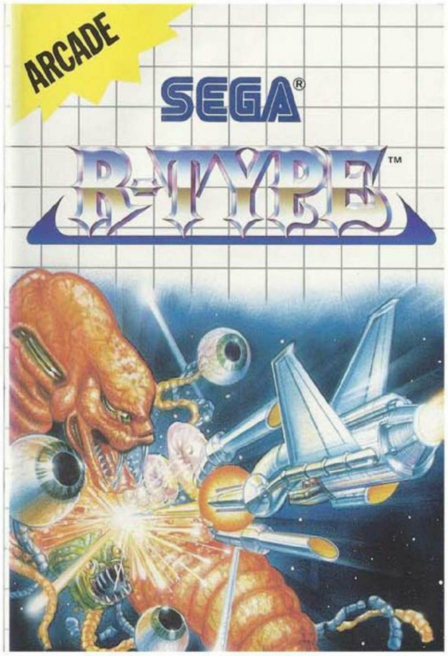
R-TYPE

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Shmup
Players: 1

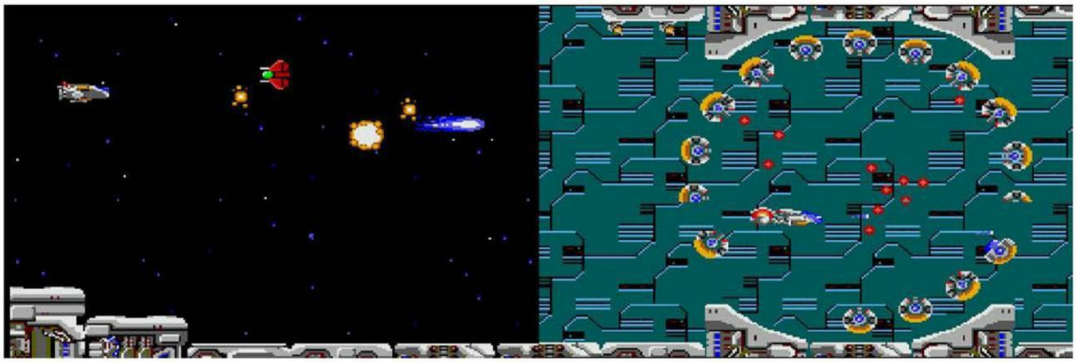
CREDIT 03
R-TYPE
TM

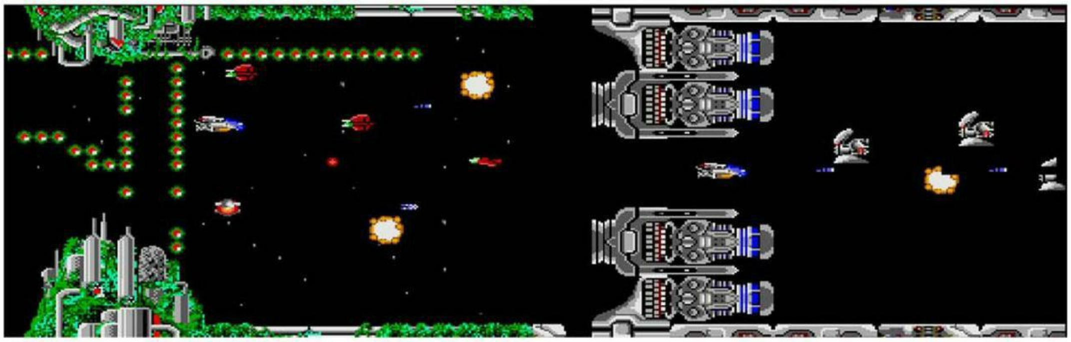
This is a nice, if sluggish, port of the classic arcade title.

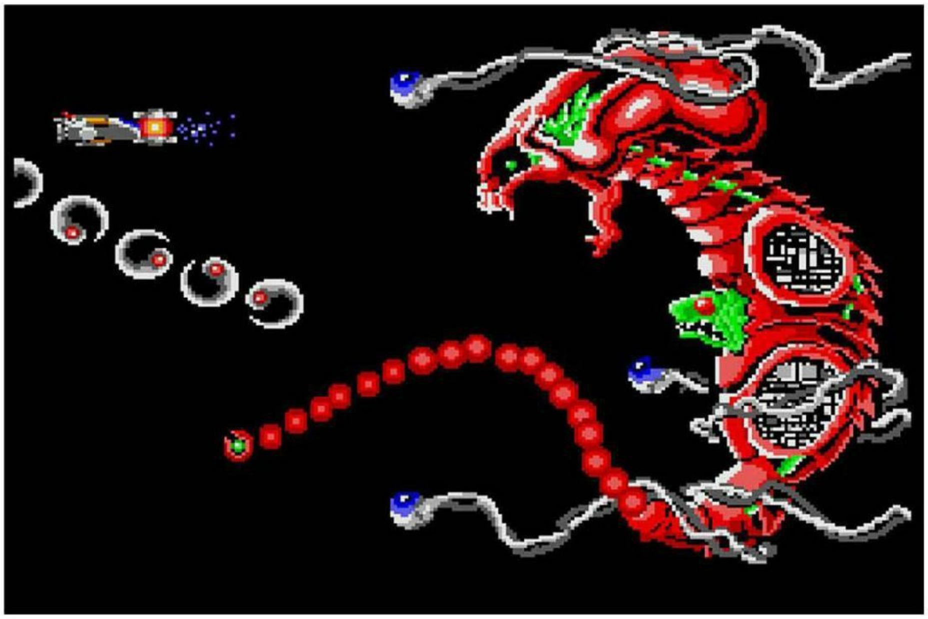

ARCADE
SEGA
R-TYPE

If you have every played a Shmup you know the basic premise. You are in control of a devastatingly powerful ship and are sent off alone to fight against some galaxy consuming enemy (in this case the Bydo Empire), and you must survive a never ending onslaught of ships, monsters and giant bosses before you can emerge victorious. Luckily you have a wide variety of power ups that can help level the playing field.

During your fight, special enemies will pop up that will be nice enough to drop some icons which can upgrade your ship. The most important of these is a multi-purpose turret that can do everything from giving you a more powerful shot to the ability to be sent flying across the screen in order to unleash a ton of firepower upon your enemies. You can also pick up the usual assortment of power ups such as missiles, lasers, and multi-directional beams. In addition to your power ups your ship comes standard with a charged shot, which can plow through multiple average enemies (and put a dent into the larger ones).







The enemies are an interesting collection of creatures. There are the standard ships that fly in formation directly at you, as well as wall mounted guns that can be hard to hit. There are also what looks to be mechanized flying aliens (like the xenomorphs from the Aliens franchise), giant mech walkers that will block your path and fire half a dozen missiles at a time in your direction. And of course we have the bosses, which can be a pain to deal with. The first boss in particular can be frustrating if you aren't a vet of the genre, as it is a giant alien with a whipping tail that shoots circular blades out of the lone weak point. Both the tail and the blades will negate your shot, so you have to time your shot perfectly in order to hit your target. This is made even more difficult by the fact your ship is incredibly slow.

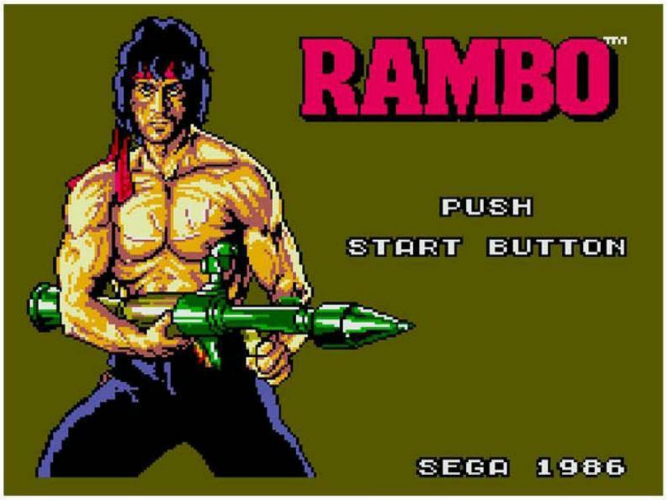
Which brings us to the flaw in this port, which is the speed of the game. Everything just feels like it's running about twenty percent slower than it should. While this isn't exactly a game killer since the enemies and the bullets do the same thing, it does detract a bit from the final product.

Sluggishness aside, this is easily one of the best examples of the genre on the Master System.

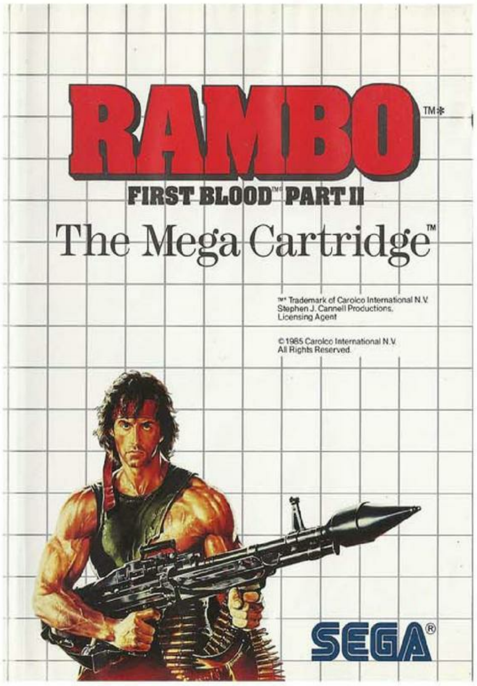
Rambo: First Blood Part II

Release Date: 1986
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1 - 2


RAMBO™
PUSH
START BUTTON
SEGA 1986

Rambo First Blood Part 2 is the first of the Sylvester Stallone trilogy for the Master System.


RAMBO™*
FIRST BLOOD™ PART II
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

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Licensing Agent

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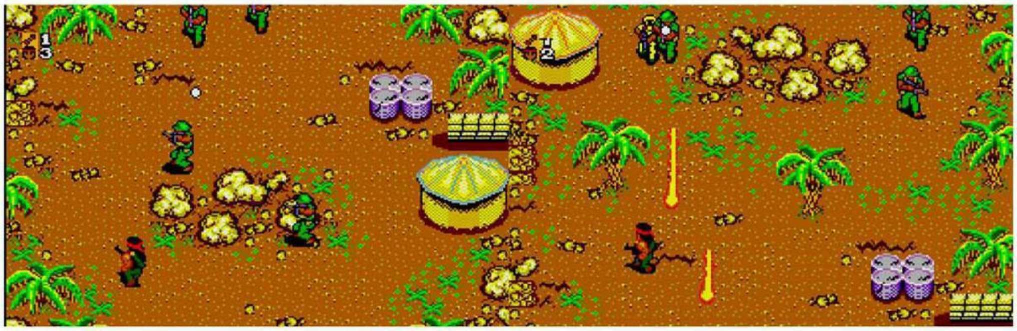
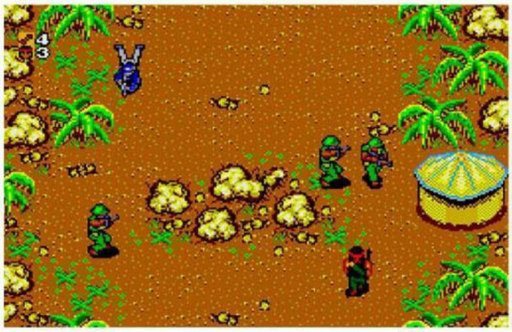
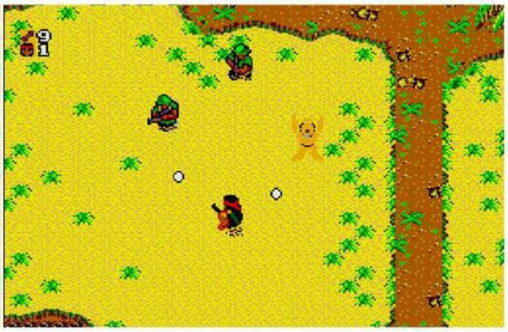
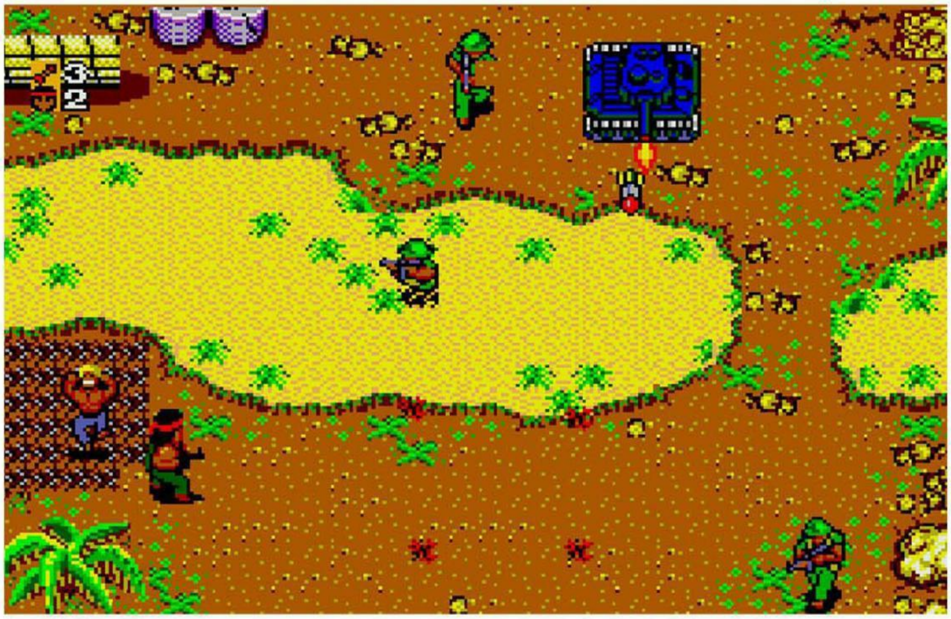
Rambo is a vertical scrolling action game that borrows heavily from the much more well known arcade game Ikari Warriors. As the famous Vietnam Vet war machine John Rambo (or his stunt double/clone since this is a two player game) you must slowly make your way north while killing an untold number of enemy soldiers while occasionally rescuing POW's from their captors. Amazingly enough, it's actually less fun than it sounds.

The problems are plentiful and painfully obvious as soon as you gain control of the hero, as he acts like he is out for a leisurely Sunday afternoon stroll rather than trying to survive impossible odds on the battlefield. While Rambo's lead foot syndrome would be bad enough on its own, its compounded by the fact that every single enemy soldier is apparently a world class track star. Seriously, the speed difference is so great that if Rambo and an enemy started at the bottom of the screen the bad guy could run to the top of the screen and back down to the bottom before Rambo could reach the top. Needless to say this makes things incredibly difficult, especially given the firepower they have.



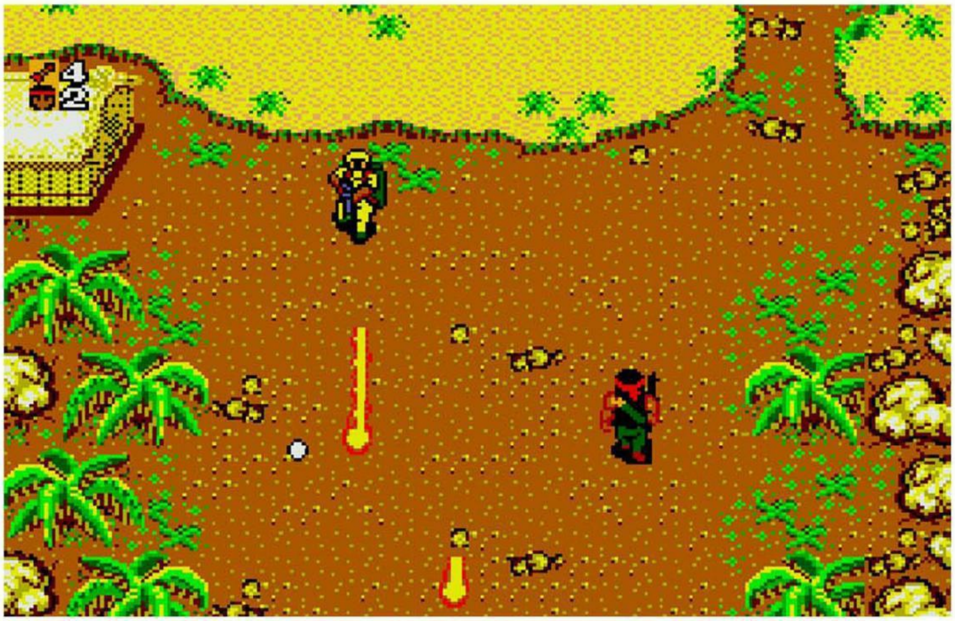






You'll be given a first hand look at the arsenal that the enemy army possess within your first few steps onto the battlefield. The sprinters with standard machine guns are bad enough, but there are snipers that fire fast moving shots that travel the length of the screen, guys with flame-throwers that fill the screen with fiery death, as well as tanks. And oh yeah, if you take more than a few seconds to fight off the hoard without moving north, grenades begin to rain down on your position. And these aren't just any grenades, rather they cause massive explosion that send fireballs in four directions across what seems like a quarter of the screen.

If you can somehow survive the onslaught for longer than a few seconds you'll eventually come across some buildings that have flashing roofs. These are where the POW's are being held, and they can be freed with a well placed explosive arrow shot, which for some reason causes the entire building to be leveled to the ground leaving nothing but scorched earth and a grateful POW who tosses you a power up (usually more explosive arrows). That said, it makes you wonder how those POW's got captured in the first place given that they are apparently impervious to explosives.



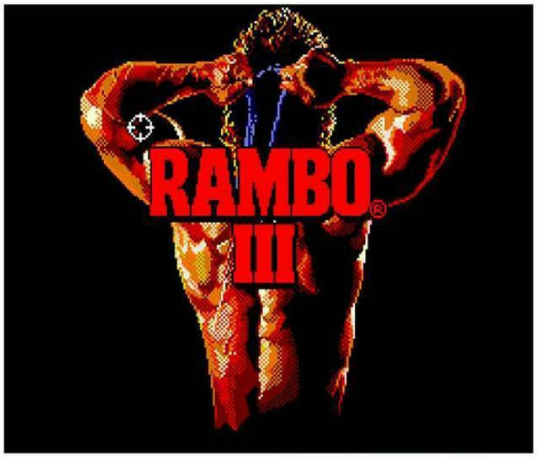
There are a total of six levels to fight your way though, but only the hardest of the hardcore players will ever see past level two thanks to the fact you get a grand total of three lives. That's not three lives per credit, that's just three lives total. There are no continues whatsoever. OK, I take that back, there are some continues but you have to look up the cheats on the internet, which doesn't really count since they would have remained unknown to the vast majority of players.

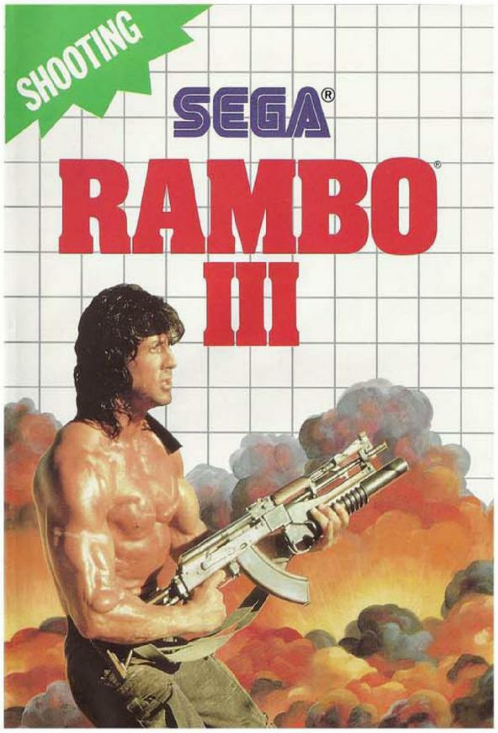
If you want to experience an unbelievably brutal game in which you will never see the second level, this is worth a look. If you want to play an arcade style action game you should look elsewhere.

RAMBO III

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Light Gun Shooter
Players: 1

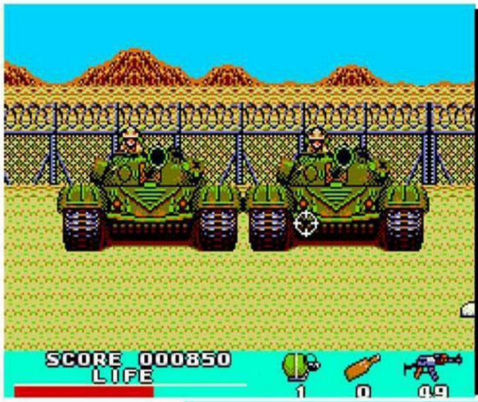


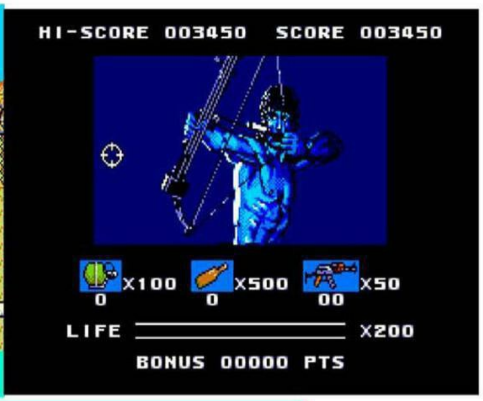

SHOOTING
SEGA
RAMBO
III

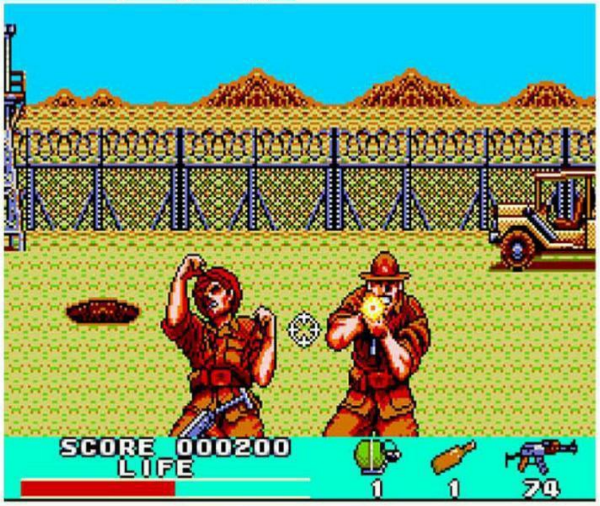
Rambo 3 is the finale of the Sylvester Stallone trilogy for the Master System.

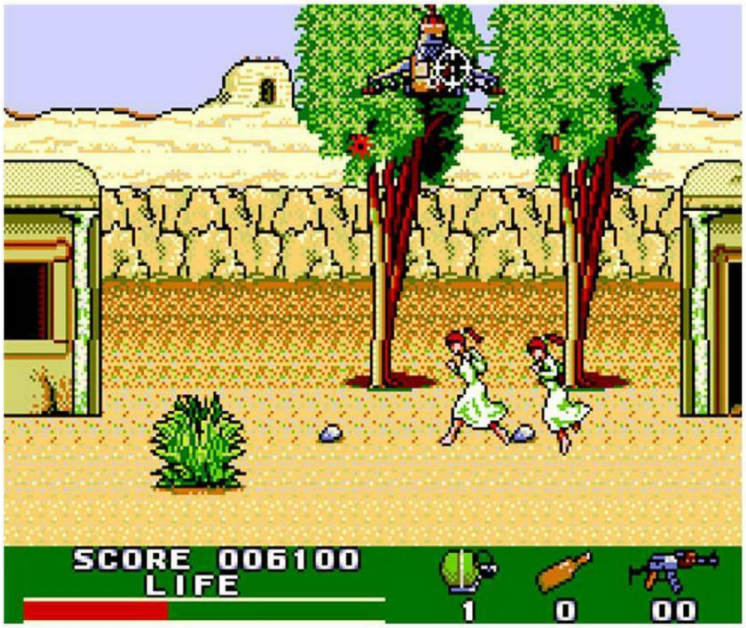
Rather than redo the previous game, Rambo 3 changes genres from the top down arcade style action to a frantic light gun shooter. The only thing that is kept in place from the previous title is the ridiculous difficulty level, which will prevent most players from ever seeing past the first level or two. Granted you do get three continues (provided you survive the first stage) but they don't help you much since all it does is give you a second shot at the level in which you died.

The story loosely follows the movie, where you are sent behind enemy lines in order to rescue Colonel Trautman from the hands of the Russians who have set up shop in Afghanistan. The gameplay on the other hand is an almost direct ripoff of the arcade classic Operation Wolf, where enemies randomly run across the screen unloading their machine guns at you. Unlike Operation Wolf, the enemies here are much, much more ruthless. How ruthless? It's possible to die within the first twenty seconds of the game.


SCORE 000850
LIFE
1
0
49


HI-SCORE 003450
SCORE 003450
X100
X500
X50
0
0
00
LIFE
X200
BONUS 00000 PTS


SCORE 000200
LIFE
1
1
74



I guess you can say that it's realistic that when guys shoot you with an AK-47 it will drain your health rather quickly, however given that this is a video game it's totally unacceptable. Bad guys will walk on screen and before you have a chance to react they will have hit you three or four times. At the start of each level you are given an energy bottle that will refill your health, but even with two full health bars it takes a minor miracle to see the end of the very short first level. If you do survive long enough to see the second level, you'll be greeted with helicopters that take multiple shots, as well as hostages that you have to avoid shooting.

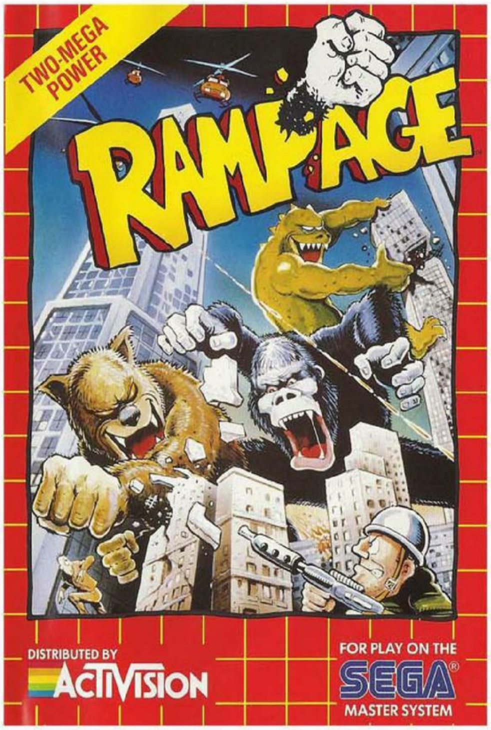
While the odds seem long, you do have a small arsenal at your disposal. You do have a screen clearing grenade, but your machine gun does a pretty good job on its own. While you do have an unlimited number of bullets, you do have an ammo counter. While you still have ammo your gun is fully automatic, but once it's empty you have to continually pull the trigger. You also get bonus points for remaining bullets, but seriously, who plays these games for the points? Open fire and have fun!

While the extreme difficulty level will cause most players to abandon this game rather quickly, it is one of the best light gun game options on the Master System.

RAMPAGE

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Activision

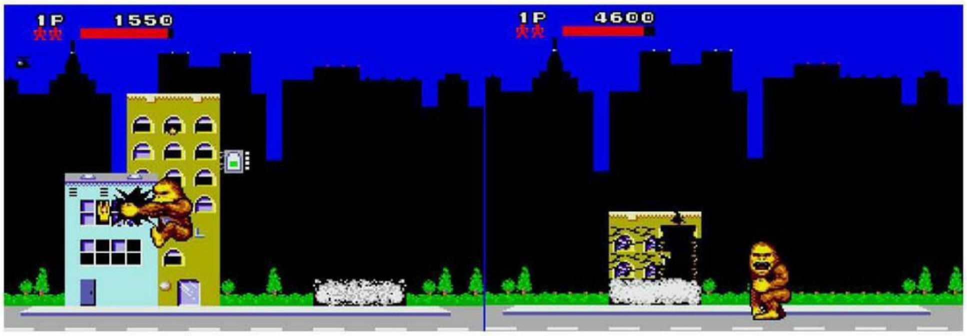
Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1 - 2

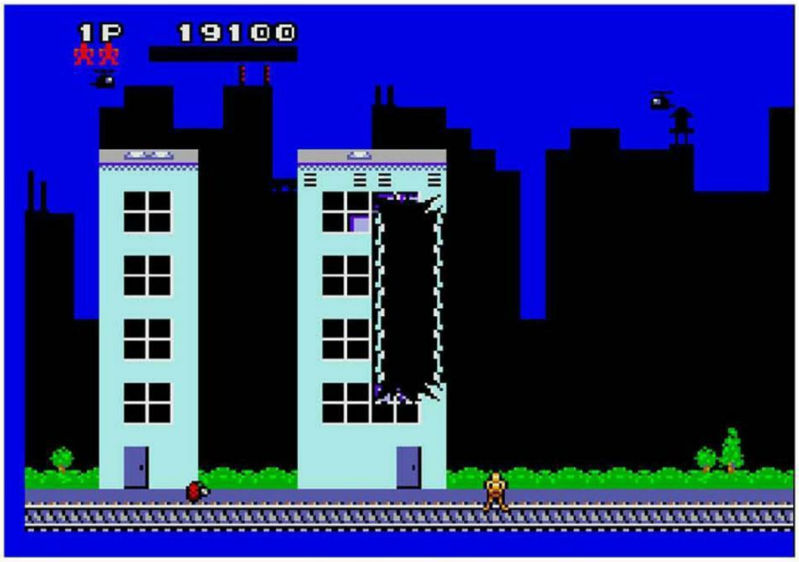

TWO-MEGA POWER
RAMPAGE
DISTRIBUTED BY
ACTIVISION
FOR PLAY ON THE
SEGA
MASTER SYSTEM

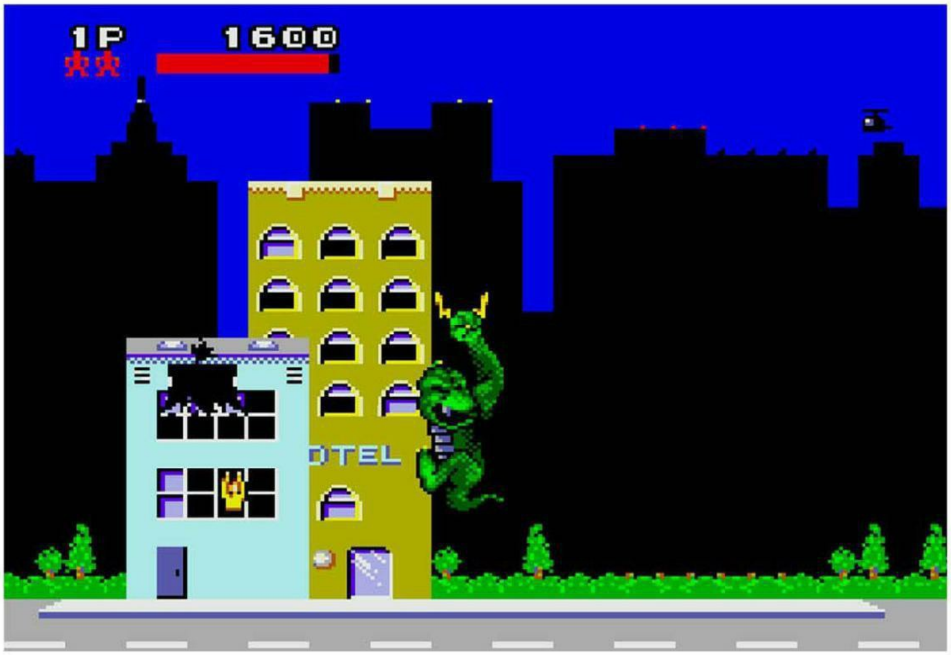
This is a very solid port of the arcade city destruction simulator.

The premise is very simple, you are in control of a giant monster who has embarked on a cross country journey to destroy ten major American cities with your bare fists. The monsters are in fact three mutated humans who were unfortunate enough to be guinea pigs for some large unscrupulous corporation. There are no real differences between George the Ape, Lizzie the Lizard or Ralph the Wolf, outside of their appearance. All three of them walk, climb, and punch the buildings in the exact same way.

At the start of each level you'll find yourself on a city street with a handful of high rises that are in need of destroying. This is accomplished by climbing them and punching them until they are so structurally unsound that they collapse under their own weight. This can be much more difficult than it sounds since on some of the buildings, especially the smaller ones, it can be difficult to find where the weak spot is.

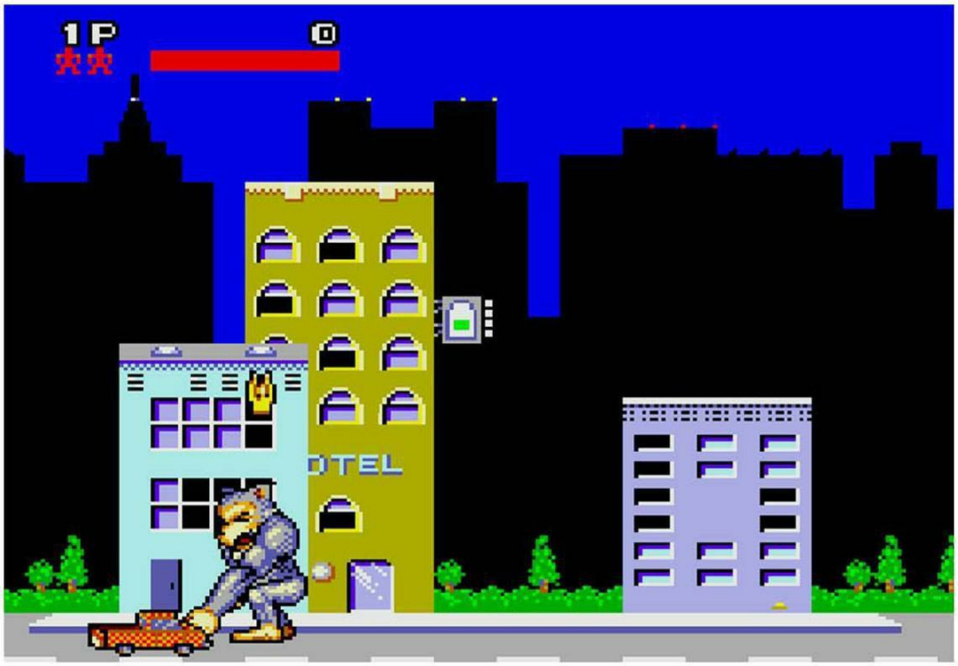






Often times you'll punch a specific place repeatedly with no luck at damaging it, only to slink down just a hair and have the entire thing come crashing down with a single blow. That said, if you spend too much time on a building you will occasionally be bailed out by the army, who is nice enough to send out a demolition expert to set a bomb by the front door.

Speaking of the army, they are out in full force to stop you and your rampaging ways. There are soldiers taking pot shots at you from apartment windows while some will throw dynamite at you. There are also vehicles causing you headaches, like the helicopters that will do flybys. You can dispatch the army by knocking down the building they are inhabiting, however it is in your best interest to take the time to work your way up to them and eat them, since they replenish your health a small amount.



Of course what fun is it to destroy the country single handedly? Not much fun at all as it turns out, which is why it's nice that you can bring along a friend on your quest for carnage. Sadly though it doesn't really make the game all that fun since every level is virtually identical and there are no goals other than bringing down every building. As a result the game gets very stale very quickly. I suppose it's fortunate then that the army will lay a whooping on your monster, which means you won't have to play it very long before seeing those fearsome monsters revert back to their frail human state. And by frail human state I mean a completely naked person covering their shame and slowly slinking off the screen.

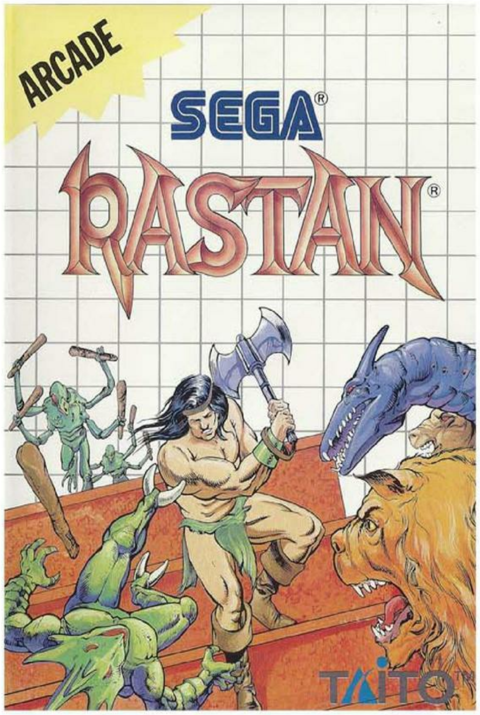
If you have a desire to tap into your inner Godzilla and destroy most of western civilization then this is a great way to do it. If however you are looking for deep engaging gameplay you should probably look elsewhere.

RASTAN

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1

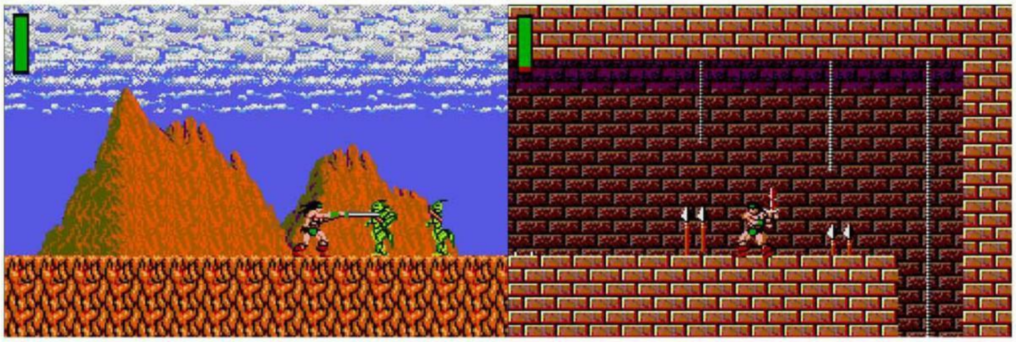
RASTAN
PUSH BUTTON

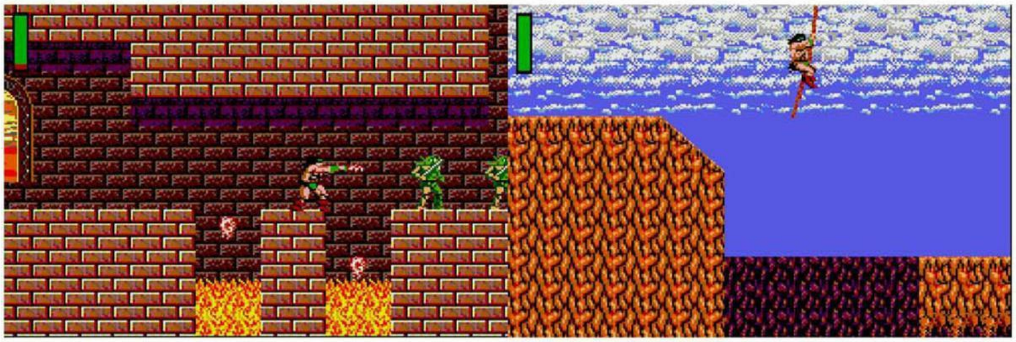

ARCADE
SEGA
RASTAN
TAITO

Rastan is a quality port of the arcade action game. Despite the 8-Bit limitations of the Master System, Rastan is fairly close to the arcade counterpart, which is a rare achievement.

You are in control of a barbarian warrior that looks like a cheap clone of Conan who is tasked with journeying through seven multi-leveled stages to kill every single thing in your path. There are a wide variety of enemies that stand in your way, ranging from manticores that spit at you, winded beasts that drop live snakes from the sky on you, flying piranha, and lizard men that look suspiciously like the Sleestack from Land of the Lost. There are also end of level bosses that will do a good job of draining your health if you aren't careful.

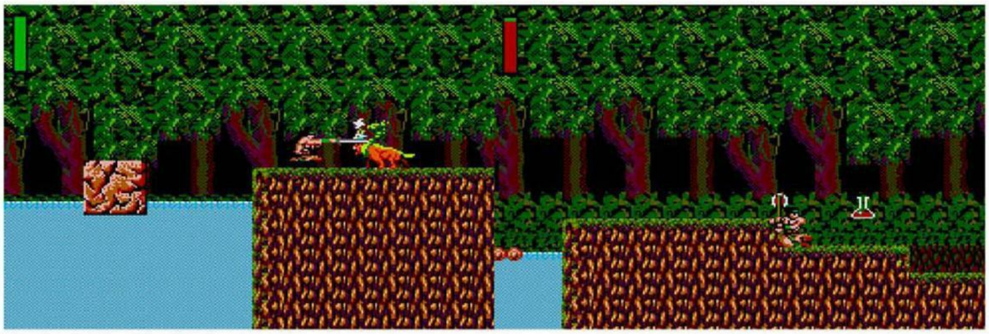
To help you defeat the wide range of demons and mythical creatures, there are a number of weapon powerups. You start out with a basic sword, but along your journey you can pick up axes and maces which extend the range of your attack. The ultimate weapon however is a flame sword that launches a fireball across the screen, which not only evens the odds, but tilts them completely into your favor. The downside is that these weapons are short lived, for if you take too much damage you lose them.

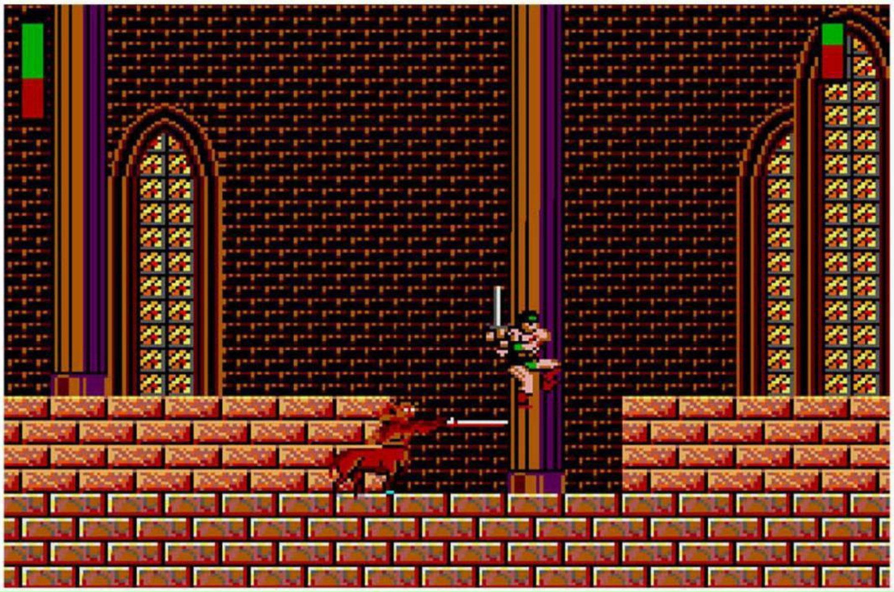


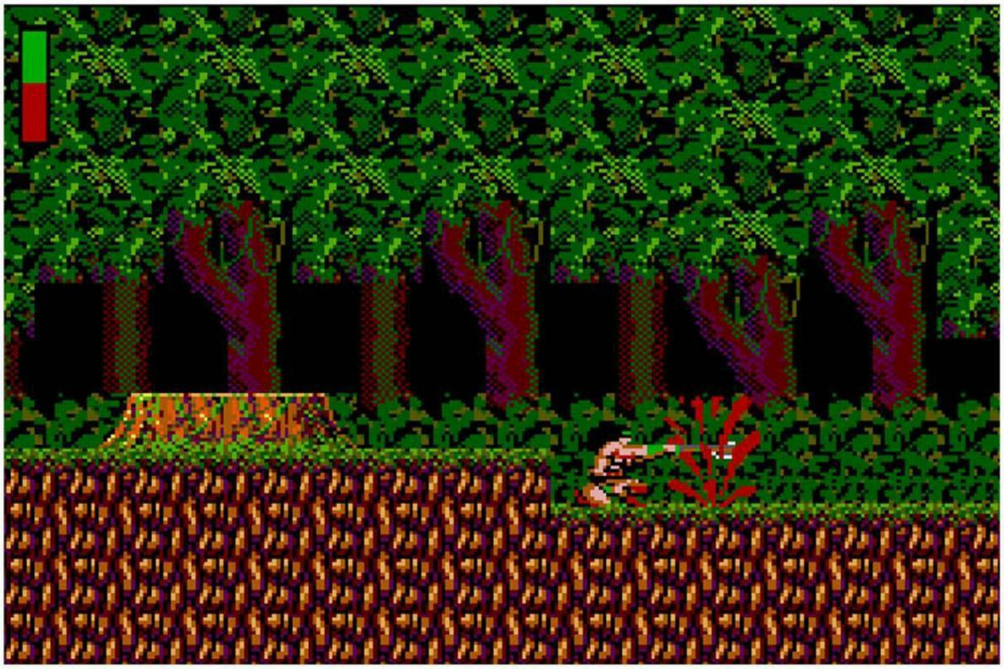


Unlike a lot of games in the genre, you can actually wield these weapons in multiple ways. Instead of just swinging them left or right, you can attack flying enemies by thrusting your sword skyward, and if you jump and find yourself about to land on an enemy, you can point your weapon downward so you cut right through them. While it's not a robust stable of attacks, it is nice to have some options.

Each of the levels play out in roughly the same way. You have to fight your way through an outdoor areas, followed by an indoor area, and finally have a one on one confrontation with the boss. While for the most part this is very straight forward and linear, there are some hidden areas and alternate pathways to reach your destination. It doesn't really add a whole lot to the levels, but it does add a touch of variety.







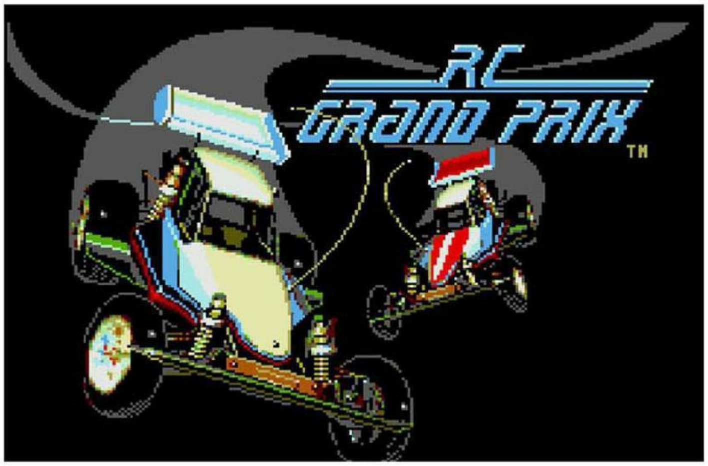
The control of your barbarian is quite good and responsive, although there is one problem area, his jumping ability. He has two levels of jumping, a standard one and one where he launches himself into the sky. The issue arises with his super jump since about halfway through he will hit an invisible wall and drop straight down the screen. This will cause him to land in various precarious situations, like on top of an enemy or in a fire/water pit. The lone saving grace is that the fire/water pits aren't one hit kills, rather it just takes a little bit of health and allows you to go about your business.

If you are looking for a decent port of a good old fashioned arcade action game, Rastan isn't a bad way to go.

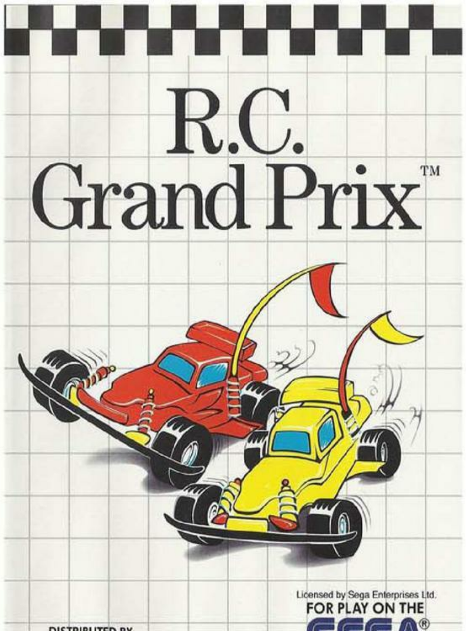
RC GRAND PRIX

Release Date: 1990
Developer: Absolute Entertainment
Publisher: Seismic Software

Genre: Racing
Players: 1 - 4

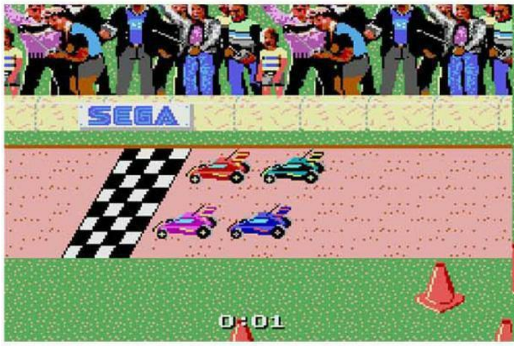

R.C
GRAND PRIX
TM

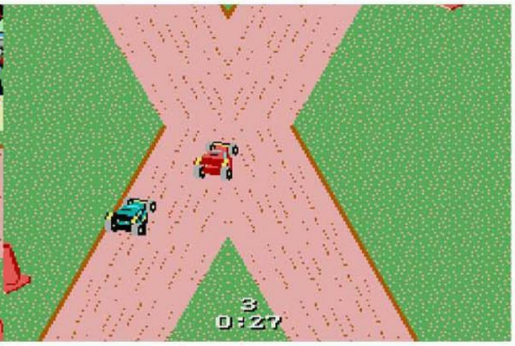
Sega's answer to the much more popular R.C. Pro Am on the NES falls well short of the 8-Bit classic.

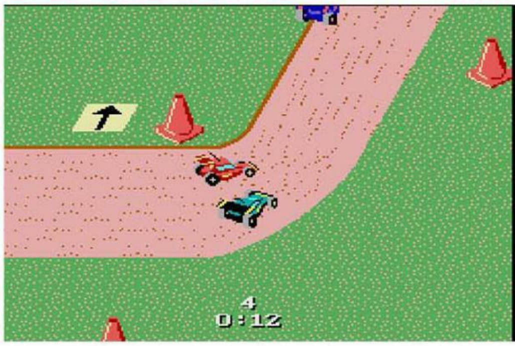

R.C.
Grand Prix
TM
DISTRIBUTED BY
seismic
Licensed by Sega Enterprises Ltd.
FOR PLAY ON THE
SEGA
MASTER SYSTEM

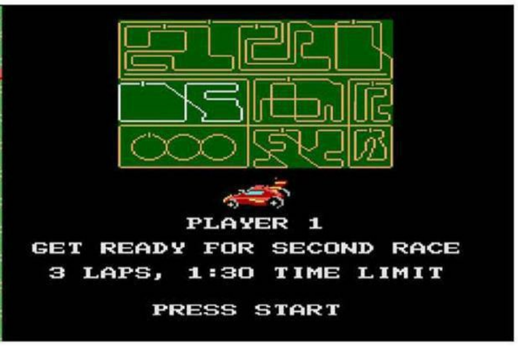
When you first start your engines you'll find yourself alongside three other racers raring to do battle on the race track. Unfortunately instead of engaging in a hard fought battle of racing skill, the entire affair devolves into a contest of who can survive the bumper car madness. Seriously, the controls are so spotty and the tracks are filled with so many sharp turns that it is virtually impossible to make it around the track without hitting a wall, and in most cases you will be bouncing from wall to wall on your journey to the finish line. It's so bad that the computer can't even make it around flawlessly.

Until you have gotten a handle on things the computer controlled cars will leave you in the dust, leaving your car all alone on the track. Of course that loneliness is short lived since the computer will often get stuck in the tight corners, leading to more bumper car encounters. It can get infuriating to finally hit a straightaway and feel proud about the fact you haven't hit a wall in three seconds only to slam into the rear of a stuck car, freeing it from its trap while sending you straight into an embankment. The silver lining to this situation is that it will be very difficult for you to finish in last place given that your opponents will almost certainly give you a chance to catch up.



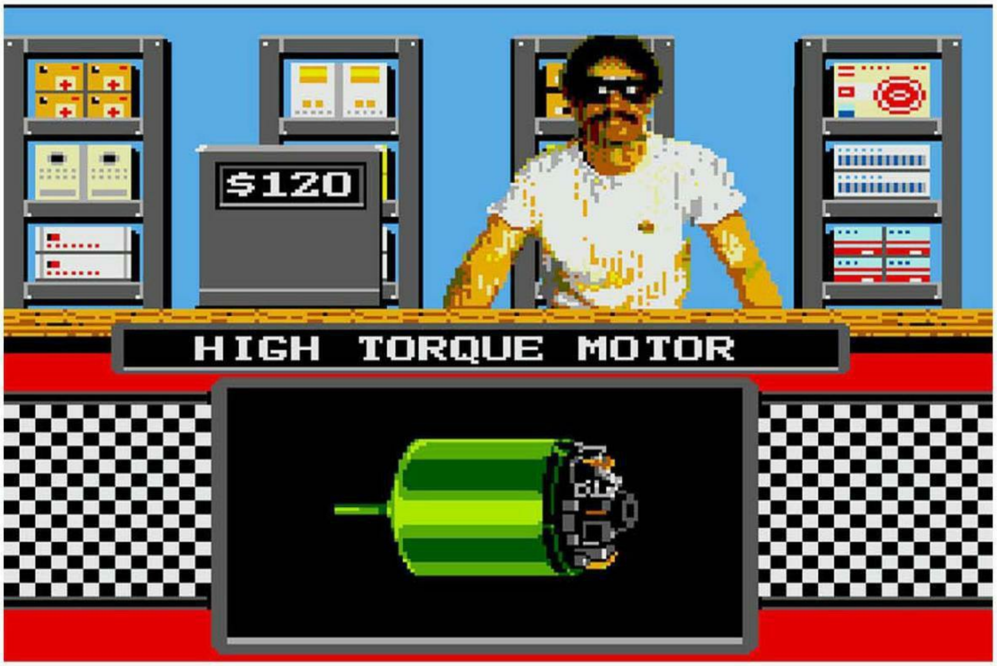


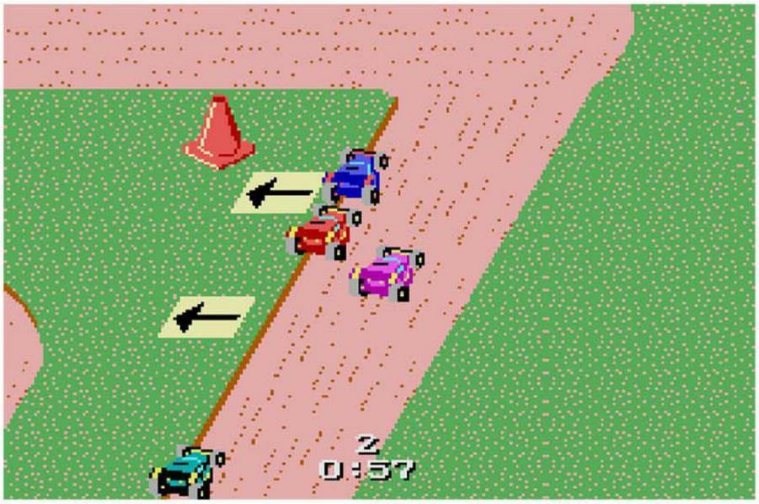



PLAYER 1
GET READY FOR SECOND RACE
3 LAPS, 1:30 TIME LIMIT
PRESS START

If you do happen to finish a race without the timer expiring (which results in a Game Over), you win a nifty trophy as well as some prize money. This cash is useful as it allows you to power up your car to obscene levels. In addition to making your car faster by purchasing new motors and gears, you can make your car corner better with new tires and suspensions. These powerups are vital if you hope to beat the clock in later races, as even with clean(ish) runs you'll still only have a few seconds to spare.

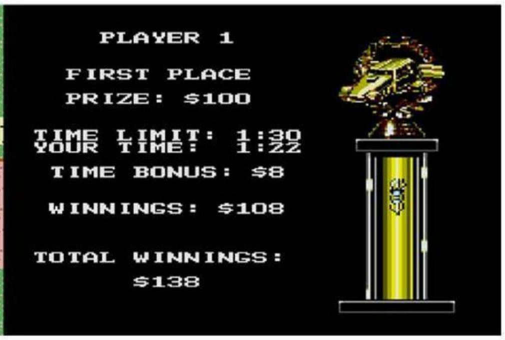
(Side Note: OK, is it just me or does the guy selling the RC Car parts look like a child molester? I mean it wouldn't surprise me to find out that the guy drove a windowless van with a dragon painted on the outside and who gets put on a watch list every time he buys a candy bar at the 7-11. It's just sort of a disturbing image, especially given that during the race you can see the kids on the side of the track controlling the cars.)





The tracks can get quite confusing, especially in the later ones. Instead of there being a standalone track for each race, everything takes place on one giant crisscrossed field. The only way to tell where you are supposed to go is with the arrows that are placed on the infield, but even they can't help if you get bumped off the correct path. Even in the first race, which is essentially just a rectangle, you can get knocked onto another path which will end your afternoon before it really begins. Given how much you bounce around the track, it would have been nice of them to put up barriers to keep you going in the right direction.

Problems (and child molesters) aside, this is still a somewhat solid racing title. It's not deep or a game that many people will want to sit and master, but it's worth a try for racing fans.


PLAYER 1

FIRST PLACE
PRIZE: $100

TIME LIMIT: 1:30
YOUR TIME: 1:22
TIME BONUS: $8

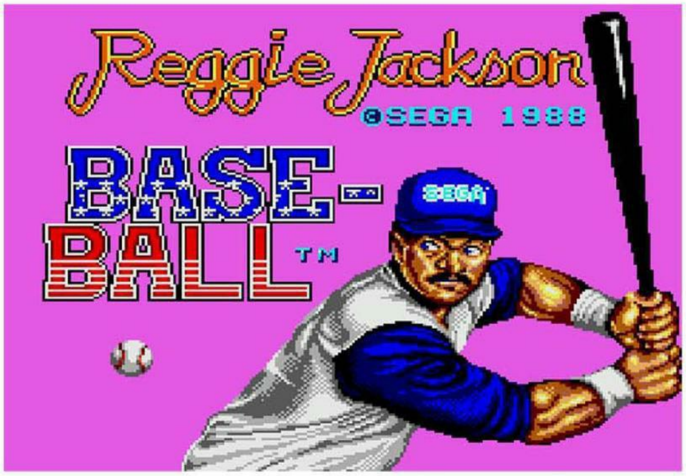
WINNINGS: $108

TOTAL WINNINGS:
$138

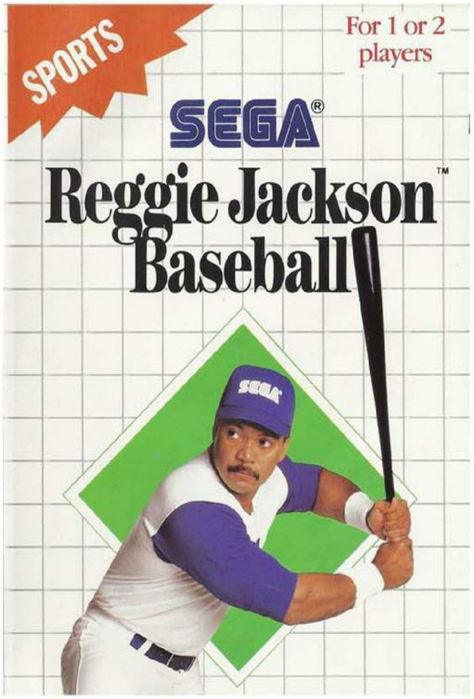
REGGIE JACKSON BASEBALL

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Sports - Baseball
Players: 1 - 2

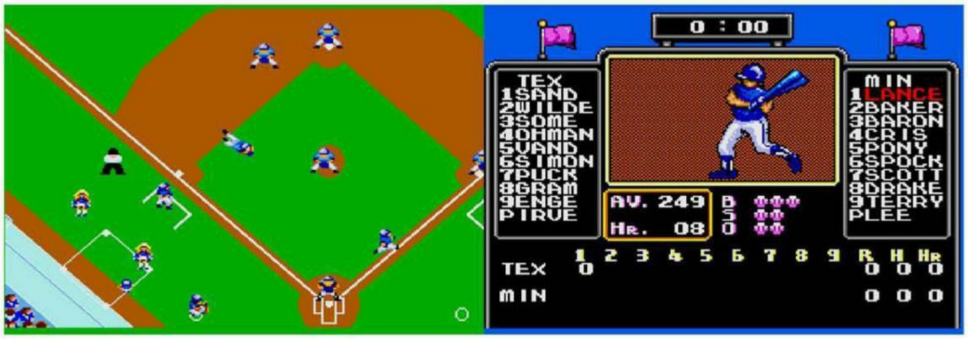

Reggie Jackson
©SEGA 1988
BASE-
BALL
TM
SEGA

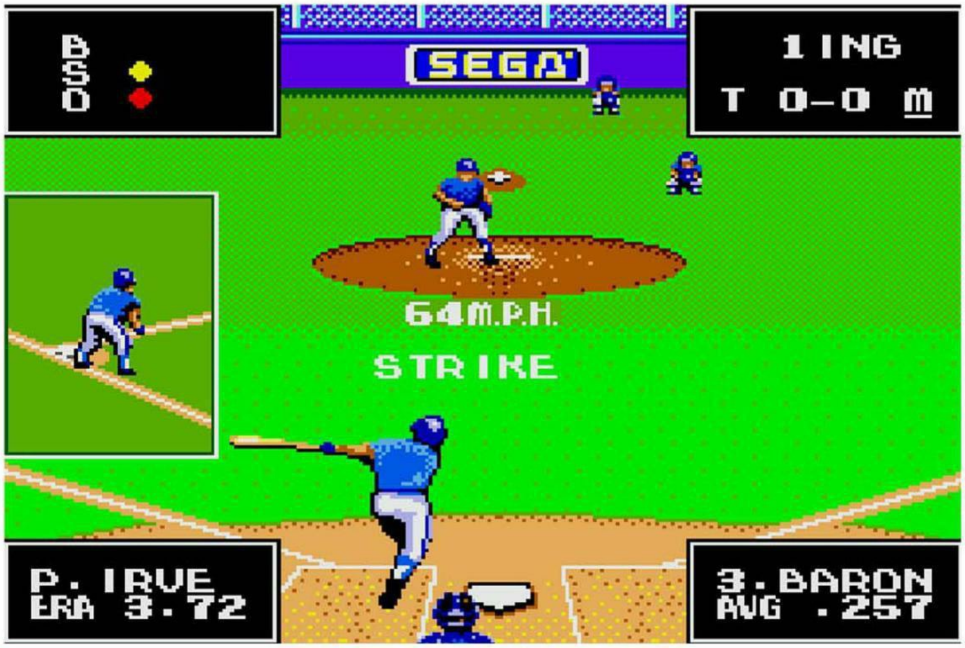
Reggie Jackson Baseball is a solid baseball title for the Master System.

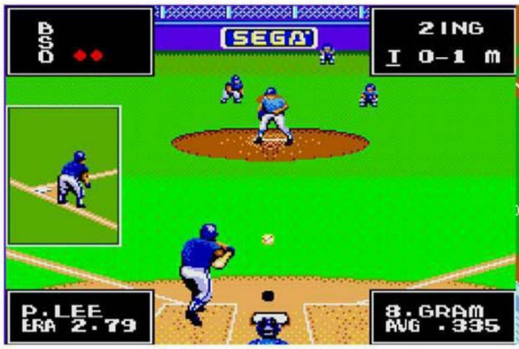

SPORTS
For 1 or 2 players
SEGA®
Reggie Jackson™
Baseball
SEGA

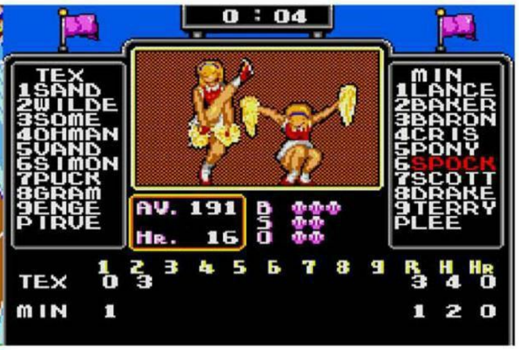
At the start your choice between playing an exhibition game, a tournament, or entering the home run derby. The home run derby is nothing more than you taking some practice swings in hopes of hitting it out of the park, and in all honesty is more of a training mode to help you get accustomed to the hitting feature.

When you play an exhibition or tournament game you get to pick from twenty six generic teams that span the entire USA. For the most part these cities are real MLB cities, but there are no real players or team names, nor are there much difference between the teams. Once your opponent selects their team it's time to hit the diamond.


0 : 00
TEX
1SAND
2WILDE
3SOME
4OHMAN
5VAND
6SIMON
7PUCK
8GRAM
9ENGE
PIRVE
MIN
1LANCE
2BAKER
3BARON
4CRIS
5PONY
6SPOCK
7SCOTT
8DRAKE
9TERRY
PLEE
AV. 249
HR. 08
B
S
O
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 R H HR
TEX 0 0 0 0
MIN 0 0 0


B
S
O
SEGA
1 ING
T 0-0 M
64M.P.H.
STRIKE
P. IRVE
ERA 3.72
3. BARON
AVG .257


B
S
O
SEGA
2 ING
I 0-1 M
P.LEE
ERA 2.79
8.GRAM
AVG .335


0 : 04
TEX
1SAND
2WILDE
3SOME
4OHMAN
5VAND
6SIMON
7PUCK
8GRAM
9ENGE
PIRVE
MIN
1LANCE
2BAKER
3BARON
4CRIS
5PONY
6SPOCK
7SCOTT
8DRAKE
9TERRY
PLEE
AV. 191
HR. 16
B
S
O
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 R H HR
TEX 0 3 3 4 0
MIN 1 1 2 0

The pitching and hitting are fairly spot on. The hitting does take a little time in order to hone in on the skill required to consistently get balls into play. This is partly due to the fact that the pitch speeds can vary wildly. For example in the same at bat you can face a 108 mile per hour fastball and a 34 mile per hour pitch. Once you make contact though the game does take a bit of a hit thanks to the fielders being the slowest things known to man. The runners are also fairly slow, so it does balance out, although it does make the game feel like it's gone into slow motion.

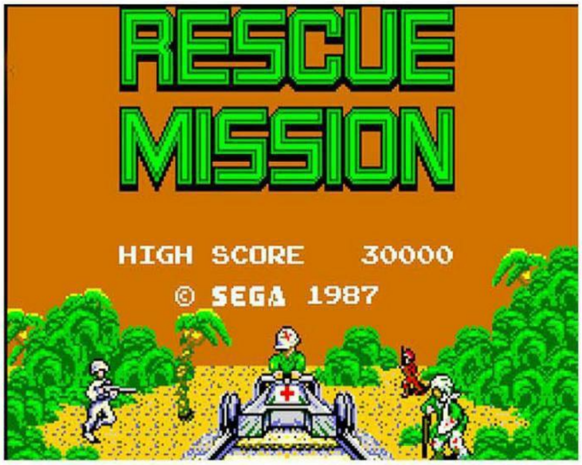
Luckily that problem doesn't break the game. There are some other nice touches, like scoreboard animations between innings, home run plate celebrations, and the occasional cheerleader sighting when you make a hit. These don't really add anything to the gameplay, but it's a welcome addition.

If you are looking for a baseball game on the Master System it's going to be this or Great Baseball. While you can't really go wrong with either one of them, neither one of them excels in any real way.

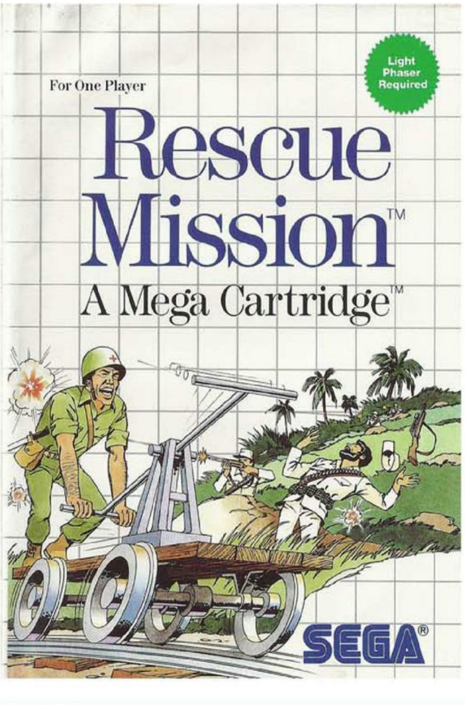
RESCUE MISSION

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Light Gun Shooter
Players: 1

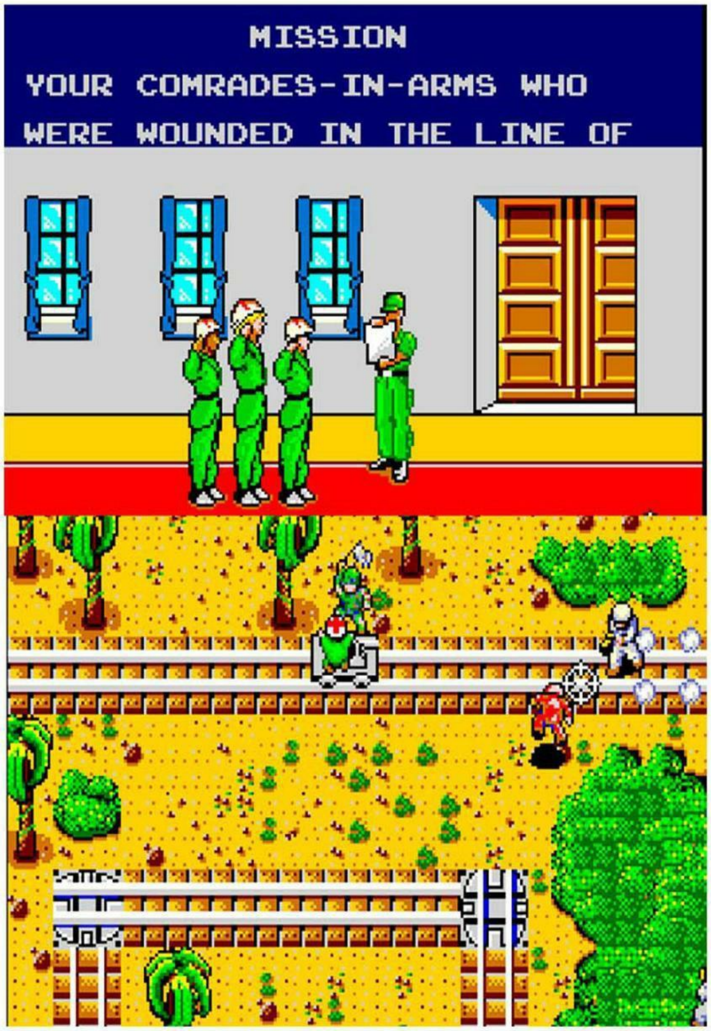

RESCUE
MISSION
HIGH SCORE 30000
© SEGA 1987

Rescue Mission is a unique twist on the light gun genre.

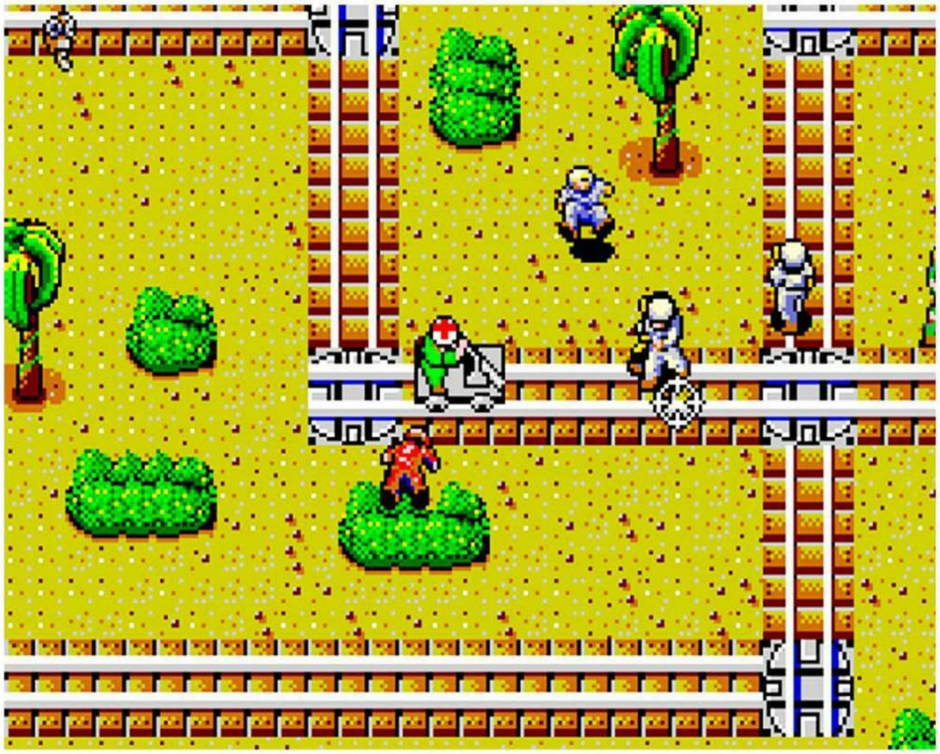

For One Player
Light Phaser Required
Rescue
Mission™
A Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

Instead of being tasked with mowing down everything that moves, you are given what is essentially an escort mission. There is a medic who is using a hand powered rail car to move through a battlefield to patch up the wounded, and it's up to you to keep him safe while he does so.

In traditional fashion, your saved comrades will drop powerup items for you. The first soldier you help out will drop an item that will be added to your inventory, which doesn't seem to have an effect on you in any way. The rest of them will drop med kits, which for some reason will kill every single enemy soldier, which honestly is kind of un-med kit like. That said, it is a welcome sight, especially since the enemies come at you fast and furious.

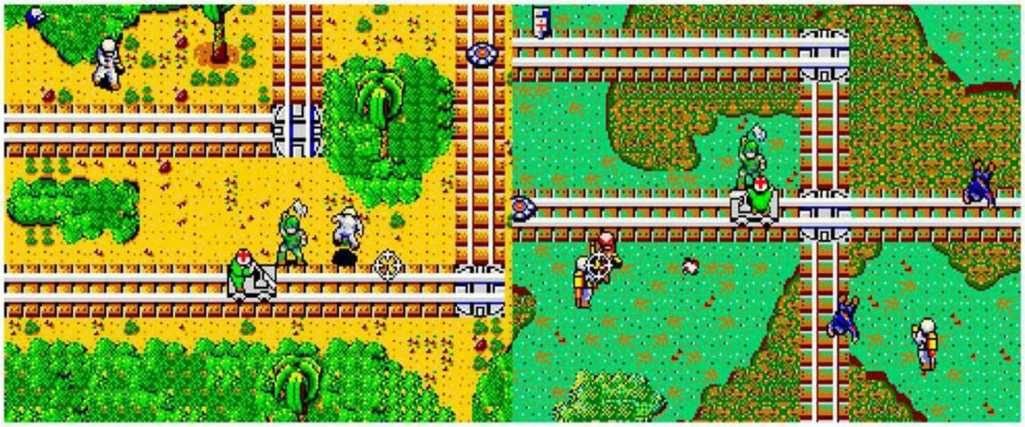


MISSION
YOUR COMRADES-IN-ARMS WHO
WERE WOUNDED IN THE LINE OF



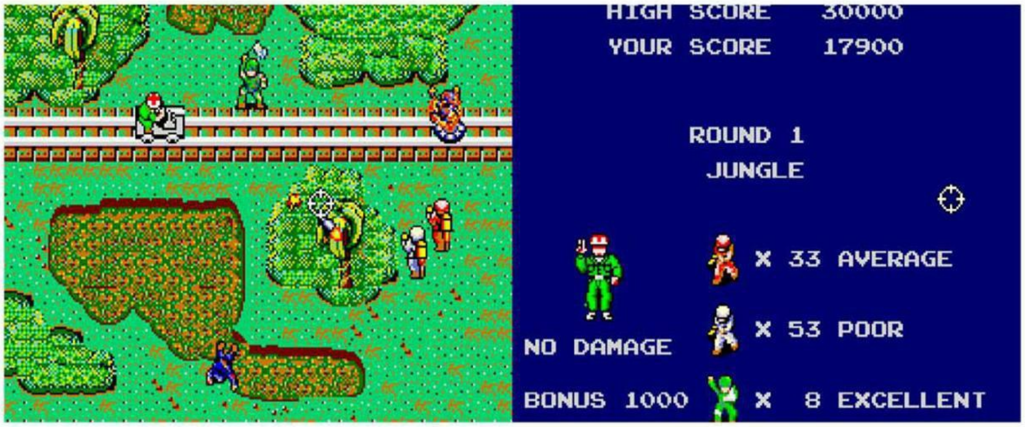
The enemies are pretty standard, and are little more than soldiers in different colored uniforms. The red ones tend to have a little more firepower, while the green ones have numbers on their side. The one thing they have in common is their ability to fill the screen with everything from bullets to grenades to bombs with parachutes. Thankfully if you aren't able to take them out before they fire you have the ability to shoot their bullets out of the air. If you are going to protect your medic for longer than ten seconds you should get accustomed to making those precise shots.

On odd numbered levels the enemy is on foot, but on the even numbered levels they sport jet packs, which make them much quicker and somewhat more difficult to shoot. In addition to the enemy, you also have to keep your eyes peeled for mines on the track, which can take out your medic just as easily as the soldiers can.



There are only five short, yet action packed levels, which can be considered a good thing since your trigger finger will be worn out by the end of those five levels. There are three different difficulty levels to play on, and you get to choose it in a rather unique way. On the selection screen there are three soldiers standing under the difficulties, and to select it you have to shoot them, sending them flying in agony across the screen.

If you are a light gun shooter fan, this is one of the best the 8-Bit era has to offer.



```
HIGH SCORE    30000
YOUR SCORE    17900

ROUND 1
JUNGLE

                x 33 AVERAGE

NO DAMAGE       x 53 POOR

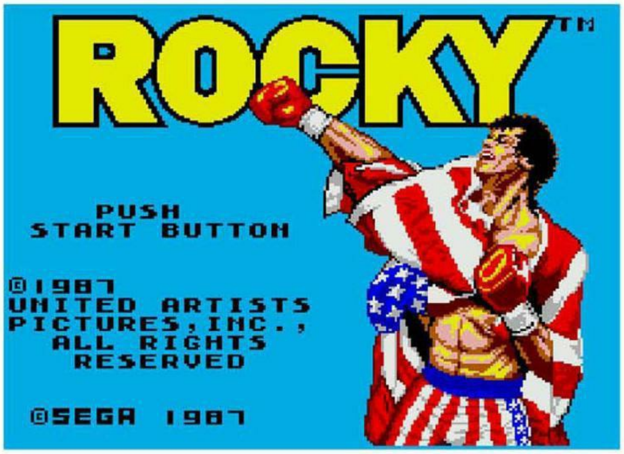
BONUS 1000      x  8 EXCELLENT
```

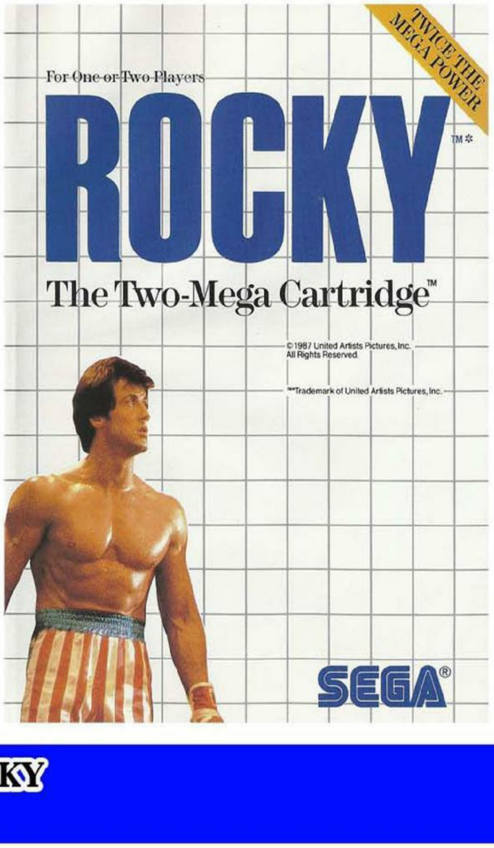
KING'S QUEST

ROCKY

Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Sports - Boxing
Players: 1 - 2

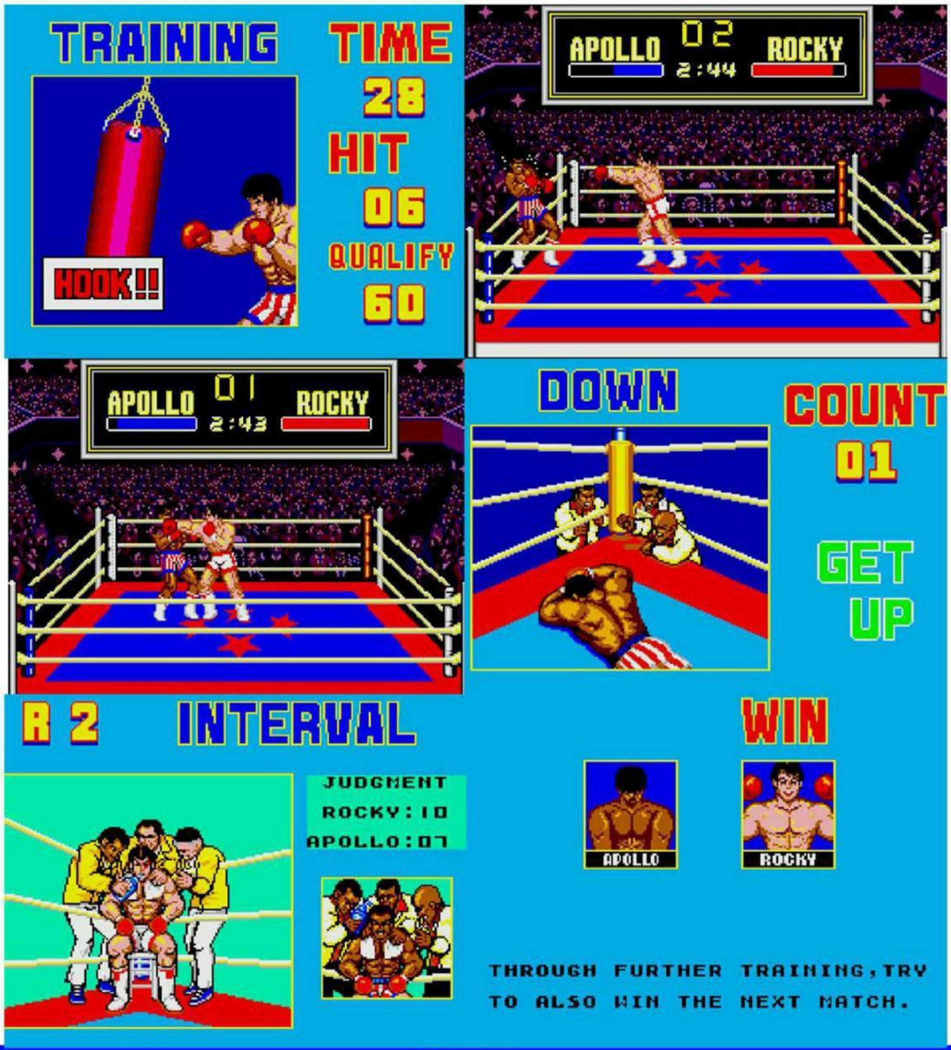

ROCKY™
PUSH
START BUTTON
©1987
UNITED ARTISTS
PICTURES,INC.,
ALL RIGHTS
RESERVED
©SEGA 1987


TWICE THE MEGA POWER
For One or Two Players
ROCKY™*
The Two-Mega Cartridge™
©1987 United Artists Pictures, Inc.
All Rights Reserved.
*Trademark of United Artists Pictures, Inc.
SEGA®

Rocky is the second entry into the Sylvester Stallone Master System trilogy.

In Rocky, you control Rocky as he recreates his three greatest fights. As Rocky you face off against Apollo Creed, Ivan Drago, and of course Clubber Lang, who is much better known as the one and only Mr. T. Seriously, does it get much better than an 8-Bit version of Mr. T? I think not.

Before each match Rocky must train for the coming bout, and if he can meet certain goals he will become more powerful. These are little more than button mashing mini-games that result in barely noticeable powerups, so while it's a nice thought it is poorly executed and is borderline annoying. Scratch that, they become incredibly annoying if you have to retry a fight since the 60 second training session has to be redone as well.

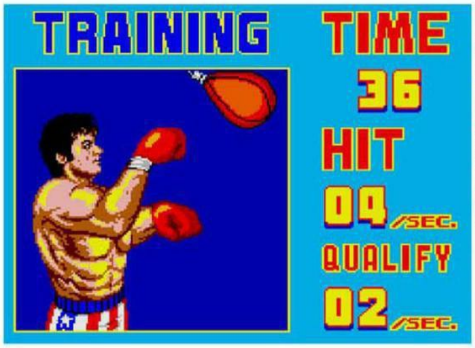

TRAINING
TIME
28
HIT
06
QUALIFY
60
HOOK!!
APOLLO
02
2:44
ROCKY
APOLLO
01
2:43
ROCKY
DOWN
COUNT
01
GET
UP
R 2
INTERVAL
WIN
APOLLO
ROCKY

JUDGMENT
ROCKY:10
APOLLO:07

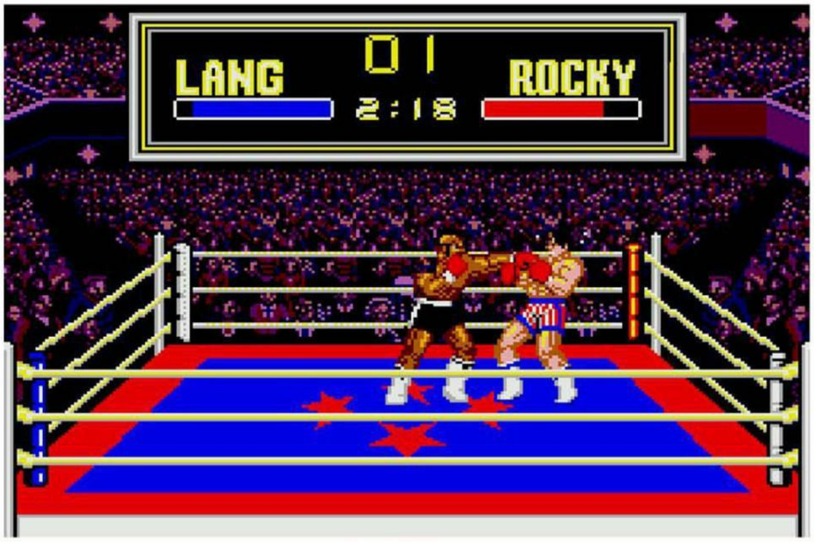
THROUGH FURTHER TRAINING,TRY
TO ALSO WIN THE NEXT MATCH.

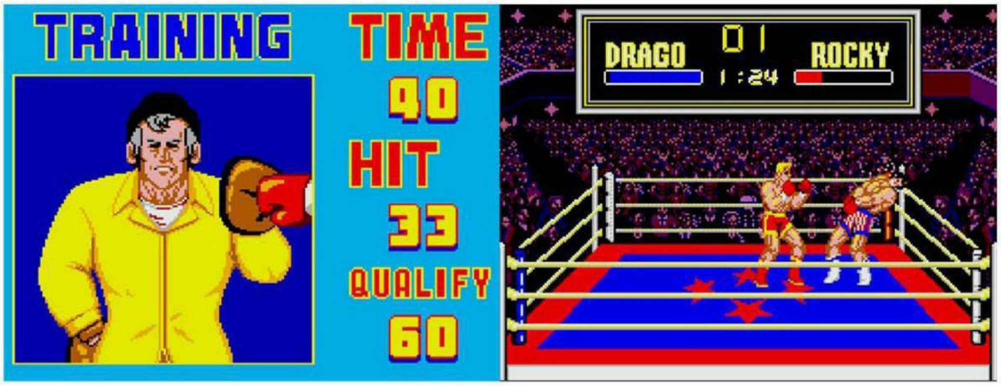
The boxing matches themselves are pretty standard. The boxers move from left to right, punching each other until one of them falls down and can't get back up. There are fifteen rounds, each with a sped up three minute clock. Judges will score each round, allowing for a decision should it come to that, however most of the time the matches will be decided much sooner with a KO or a TKO.

The first two matches against Apollo and Clubber respectively are way too easy, while the fight against Drago is downright difficult. For Apollo all you really have to do is hit the punch button as quickly as you can and you'll do combo after combo until Apollo is crying in defeat (seriously, defeated boxers look like they are crying). For Clubber there is a slight change in strategy as you have to hold the directional pad down while punching. It's quite a grind for both of them but you will emerge victorious within a couple of rounds. Drago however will more than likely beat you senseless within a single round.



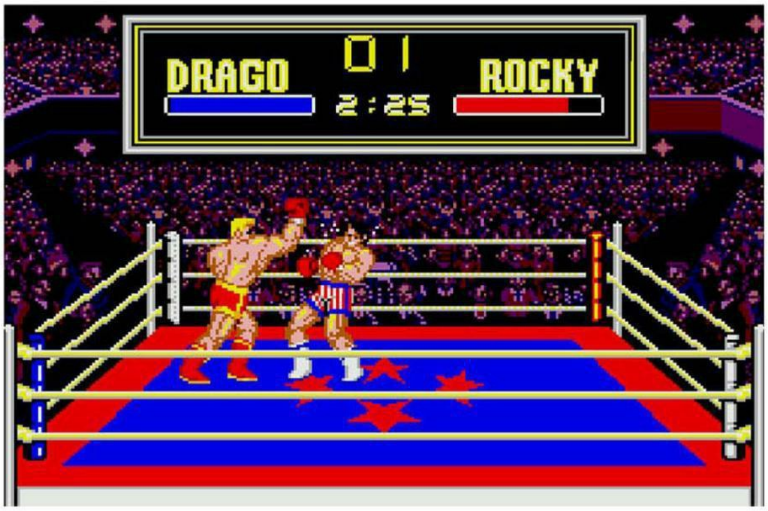
LANG
02
1:52
ROCKY





And this is the biggest problem with the game, it's little more than a button masher. There is only the single punch button that you hit as quickly as you can, and a duck button which is all but useless. Well that and the two player mode has a glaring omission. Rather than letting people pick their boxers, one player is forced to play as Rocky. As a result we will never be able to answer that age old question of who would win in a fight, Mr. T. or his clone? Plus there are only a total of four boxers in the game, so there's not a whole lot of variety.

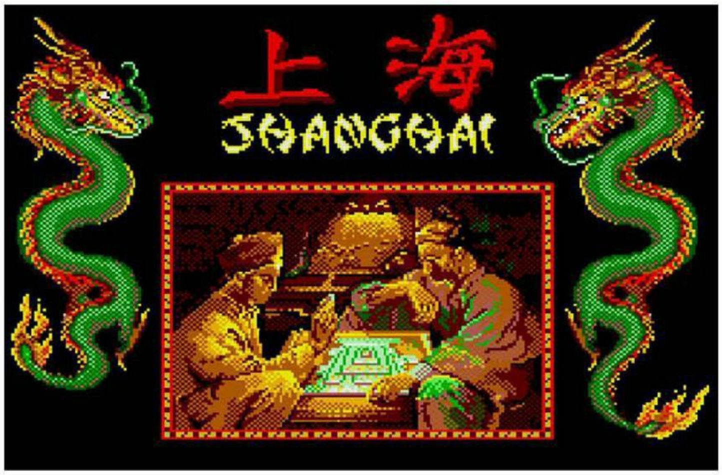
Problems aside, this is still a relatively solid boxing title and is a rare example of a game based on a movie that isn't a complete and total failure.

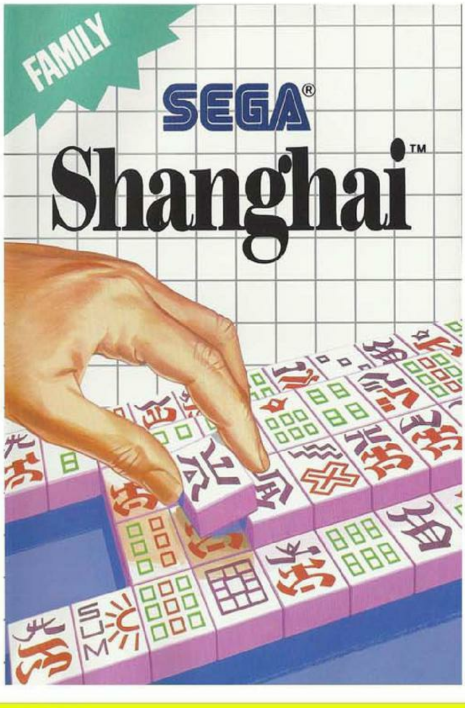


SHANGHAI

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

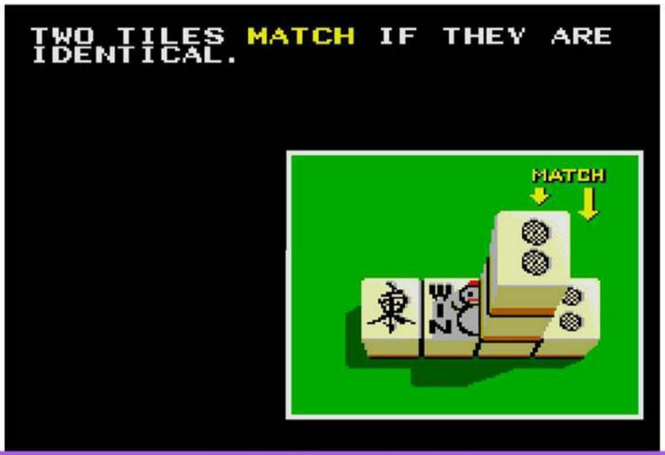
Genre: Board Game
Players: 1 - 2

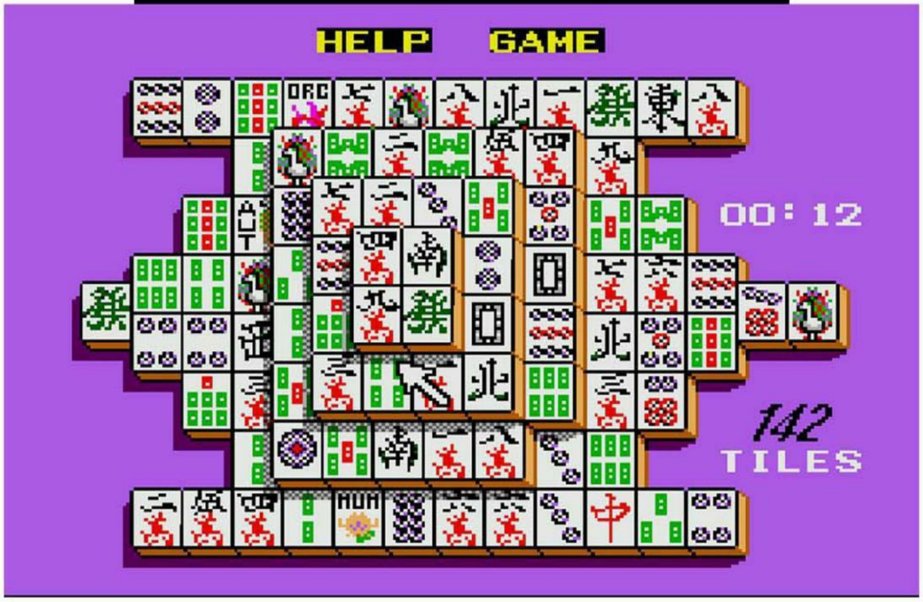

上海
SHANGHAI

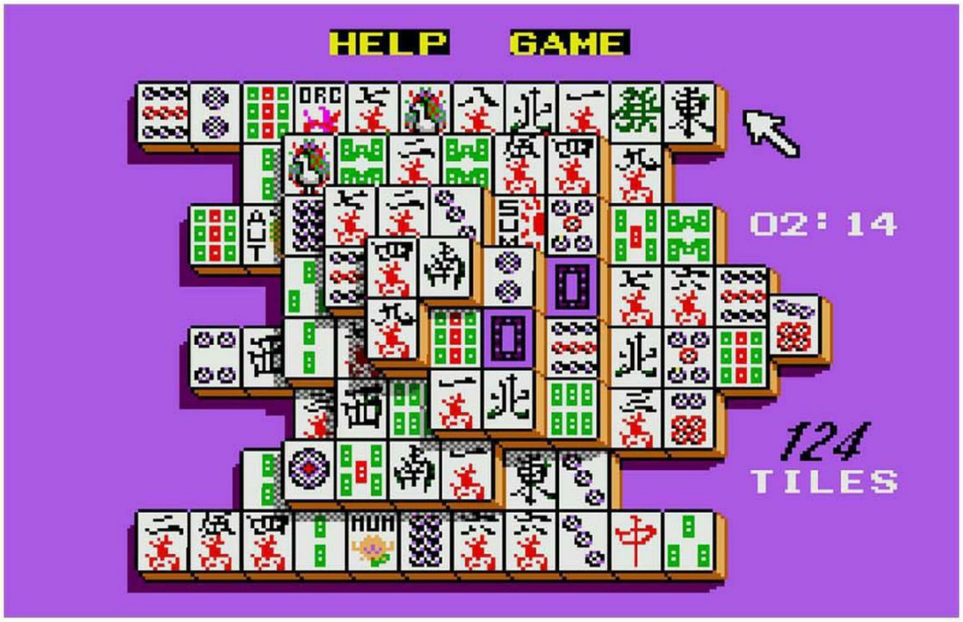

FAMILY
SEGA®
Shanghai™

Shanghai is the digital version of the ancient Chinese game of Mahjong.

For the uninitiated, you match tiles to remove them from the game board. There are a couple dozen different designs on the tiles, ranging from seasons to Chinese characters to different objects in different quantities. The only way you can remove the tiles is if you find two identical ones that are "free", meaning that they aren't covered up in any way. Pretty much if either the left or the right side of the tile isn't blocked by another tile, then it's considered free. This continues until the board has been cleared of all of the tiles, or if there are no more legal moves for you to make. While the game makes sure that every single game is winnable, it can be quite difficult to do so since if you remove tiles in the wrong order, it will be impossible to continue.


TWO TILES MATCH IF THEY ARE IDENTICAL.





There are a couple of different gameplay types, including a timed solitaire mode, and a two player tournament mode where two players play on the same board but have a limited time to make a move. Other than that, it's just plain old Mahjong.

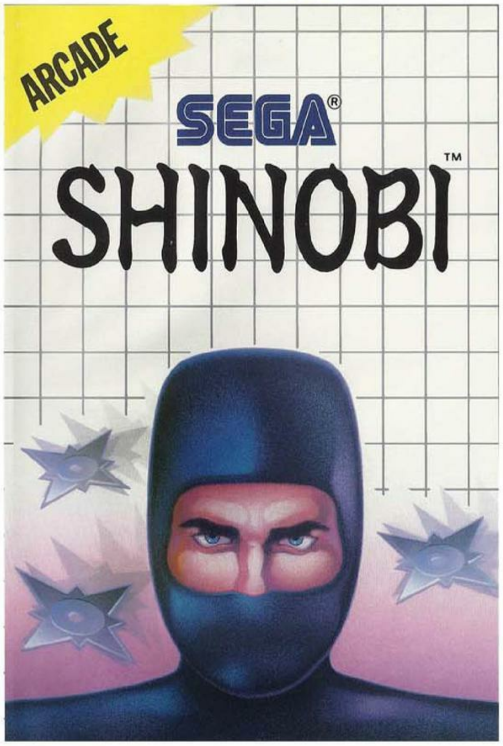
Now, to anyone who is reading this and is under the age of twenty who might be asking yourself, why in the world would anyone pay fifty bucks to play a slow moving version of a game that can be found on a thousand different sites on the internet for free, just remember one thing. Back when we were young, we didn't have the internet, so if we wanted to play a thousand year old puzzle game we either had to pay fifty bucks or keep track of a ton of painted wooden tiles. Yeah, that's right, you better appreciate the time you live in.

SHINOBI

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

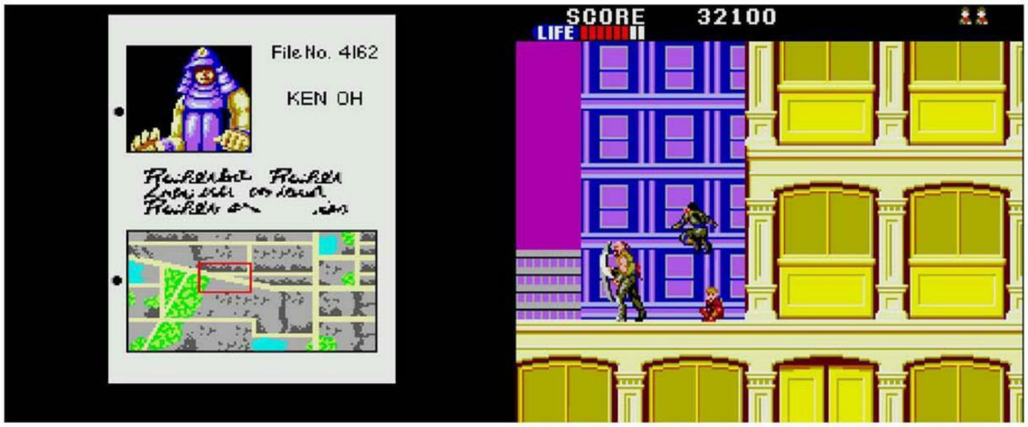
Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1

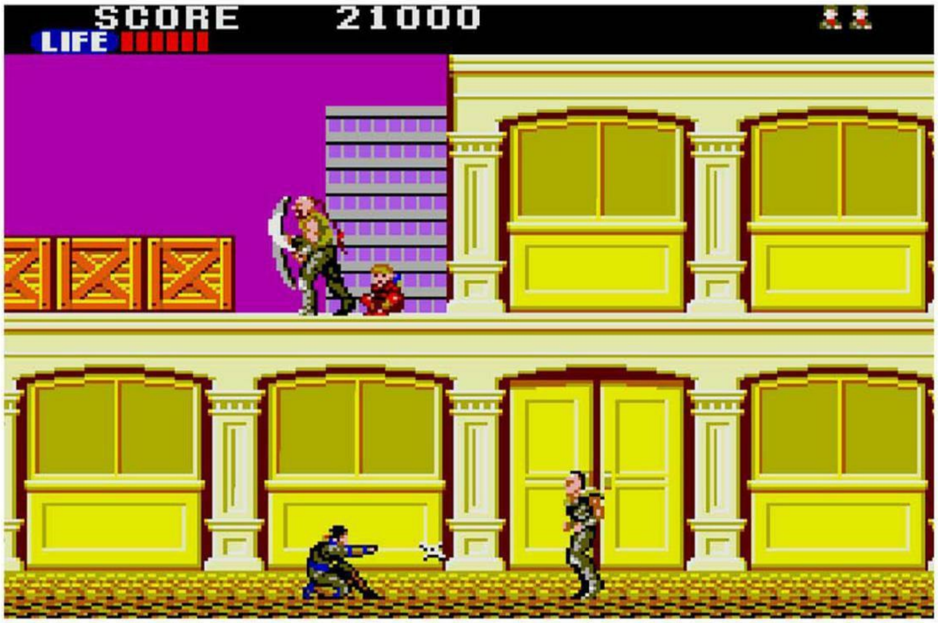
Shinobi is a near perfect arcade port of the classic arcade game.

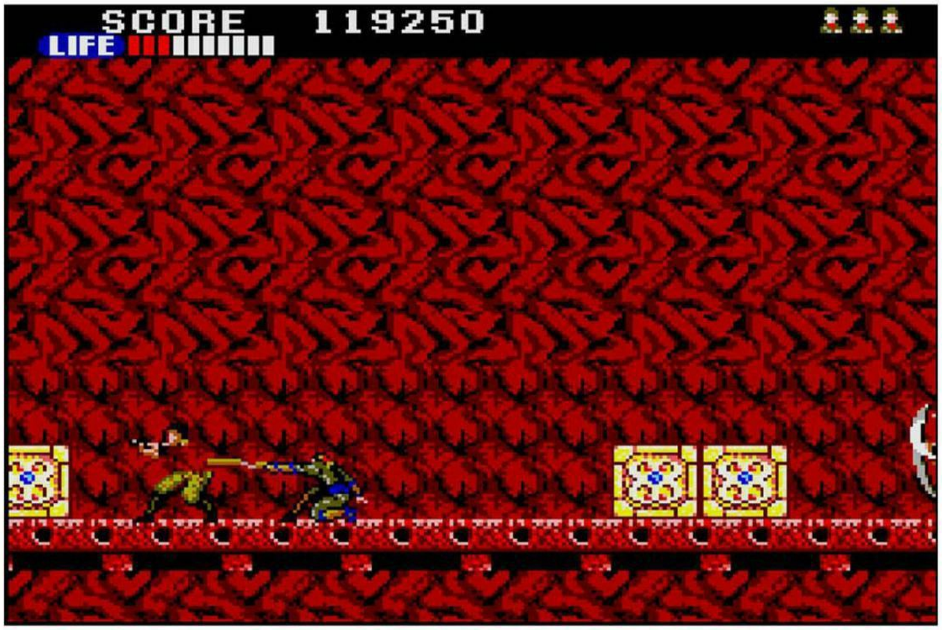

ARCADE
SEGA®
SHINOBI™

You control ninja master Joe Musashi as he battles the terrorist organization The Ring of Five. They have kidnapped the children of all the worlds leaders, and it's up to Joe to save them. The kids are scattered randomly across five levels and are guarded by sword throwers, gunmen, and a wide variety of ninjas.

(Side note: If the terrorist organization was smart enough to be able to kidnap the children of world leaders, then why on earth do they just leave them out in the open on city streets and such? That doesn't exactly scream "master criminal" to me).

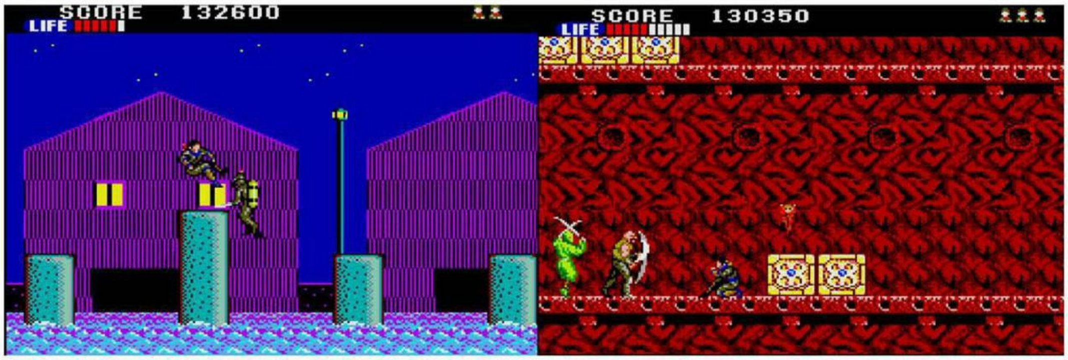






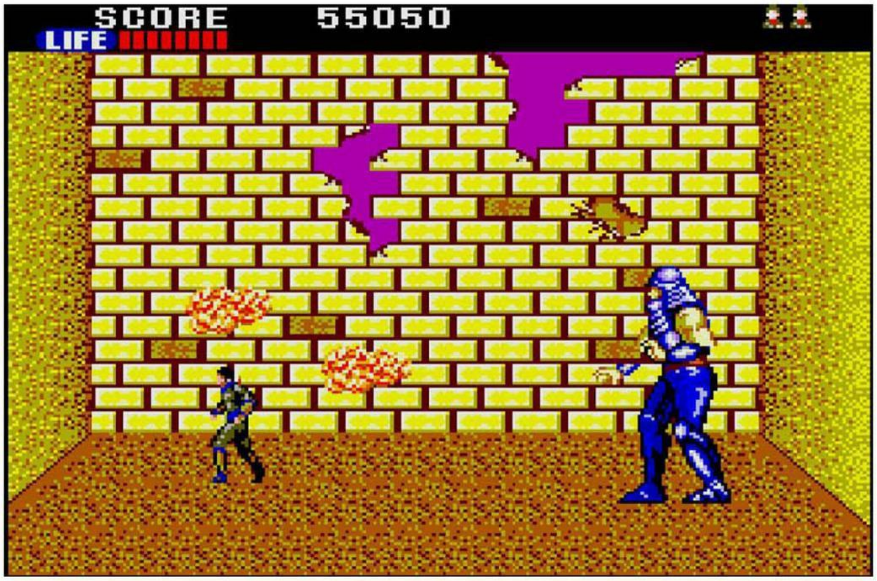
Each of the five stages has multiple levels within each that must be tackled. For the most part they are the "walk from left to right until you get to the end" variety, however some require you to climb upwards to the top of the screen. Each stage also has two different plateaus that must be traversed in order to rescue all the children and to kill all the bad guys. Joe has the ability to do a super jump, which will catapult him to the upper or lower parts of the stage. There is some strategy that must be employed, since the enemies will be waiting on you. If you are able to line your jump up correctly you'll be able to do a sneak attack on the enemy before he realizes you are there.

Which brings us to weapons. Starting out the ninja master has nothing more than ninja stars and his feet, but by rescuing children he is able to upgrade his weaponry. For the up close and personal he can wield ninja swords and nunchucks, and for the distance attacks he can upgrade to grenades and guns. Now I'm not exactly sure what the ninja code says about using grenades, but it feels like an odd choice. Plus the grenade really isn't an upgrade, as it has a much more limited range. The lone upside to the weapon is that if you are kneeling you can roll the grenade on the ground, which is somewhat useful since it will explode when an enemy touches it.


SCORE 132600
LIFE
SCORE 130350
LIFE

f you manage to survive the first part of the stages, you get to face off against a giant boss. These bosses are massive, and range from a fire throwing madman that has a single weak spot in his helmet to a ninja loaded chopper to an oversized samurai. If you can defeat the boss, congratulations, you get to move onto an even harder level.

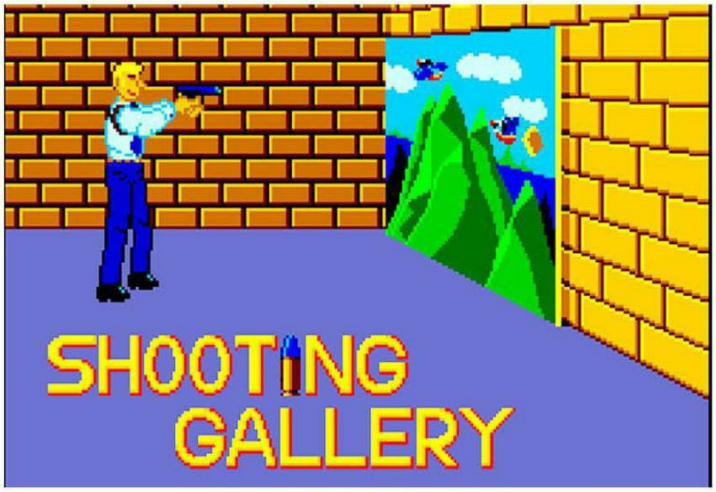
Shinobi is arguably the best arcade port on the Master System, and one of the best of the 8-Bit era as a whole.

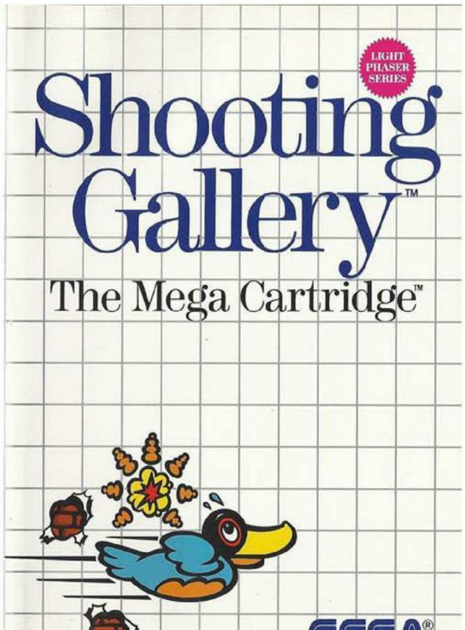

SCORE 55050
LIFE

SHOOTING GALLERY

Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Light Gun Shooter
Players: 1


SHOOTING
GALLERY


LIGHT PHASER SERIES
Shooting Gallery™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

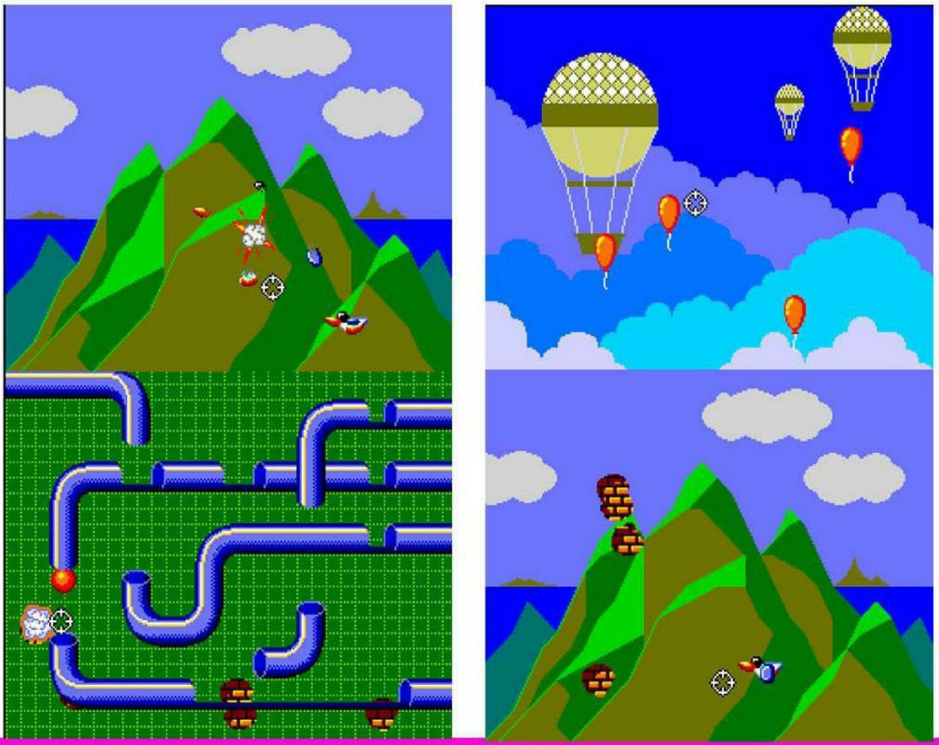
Shooting Gallery is a light gun game that is about as basic as it gets.

Upon starting you are taken to a themed stage, like the mountains or sky, and various things show up that are in need of shooting. If you shoot enough of them you get to continue on to the next level and do it all again.

Normally in games like this there are a ton of things to shoot, not here however. On the first level there are a grand total of nine ducks to shoot. Nine. The entire level takes fifteen seconds to play, and if you hit three of the ducks congratulations, you get to play another fifteen second level.

There are a couple of nice touches worked into the levels however, like when you shoot balloons you send the surrounding balloons flying across the screen in a random way. There is also a pipe level where the targets will work their way through, occasionally appearing in the gaps. While these are nice touches, it really doesn't make a huge impact on the game.

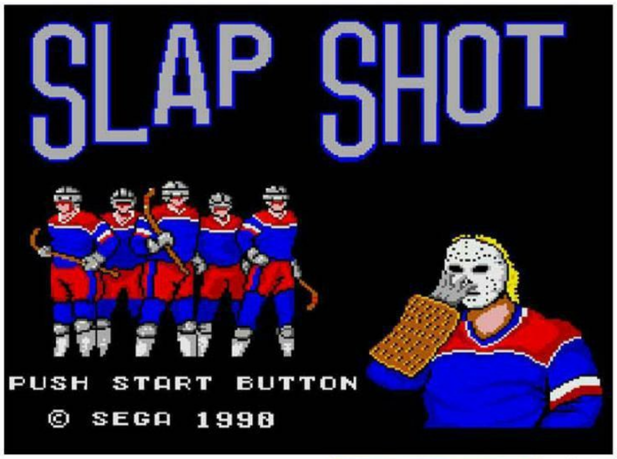
And sadly, that's about all there is to this game. If you are looking for a solid training system to improve your virtual aim, this is it. If you are looking for something fun and engaging, this isn't it.



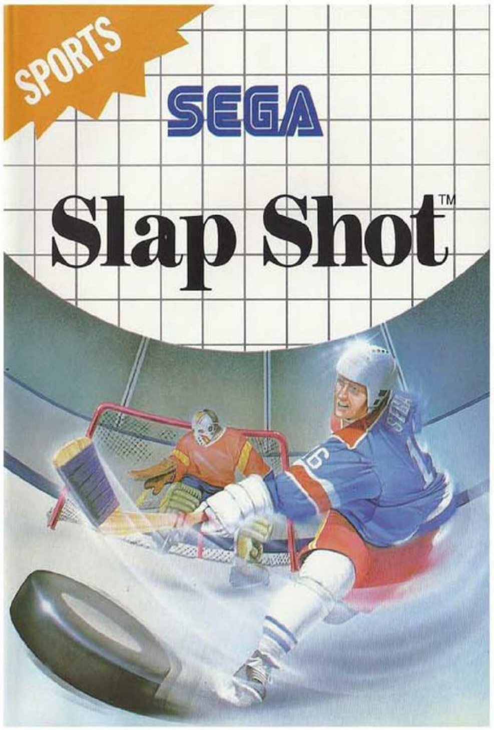
SLAP SHOT

Release Date: 1990
Developer: Sanritsu
Publisher: Sega

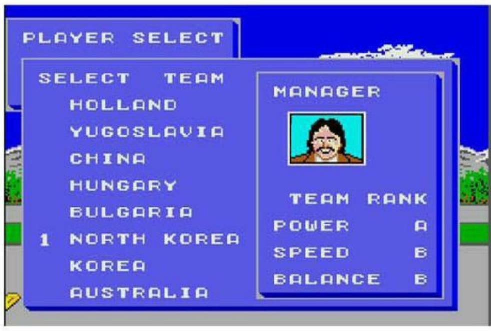
Genre: Sports - Hockey
Players: 1 - 2

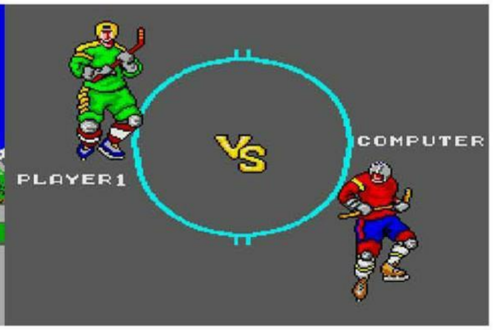

SLAP SHOT
PUSH START BUTTON
© SEGA 1990

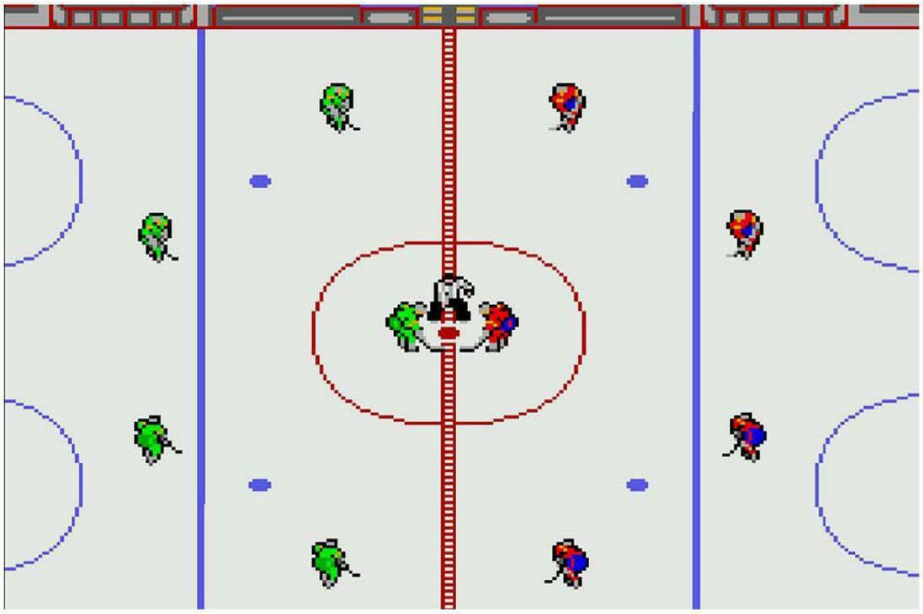
Slap Shot is hands down the best hockey game on the Master System. Granted the only competition is the vastly inferior Great Hockey which requires a special controller just to play, but is still one of the best examples of the sport from the 8-Bit era.

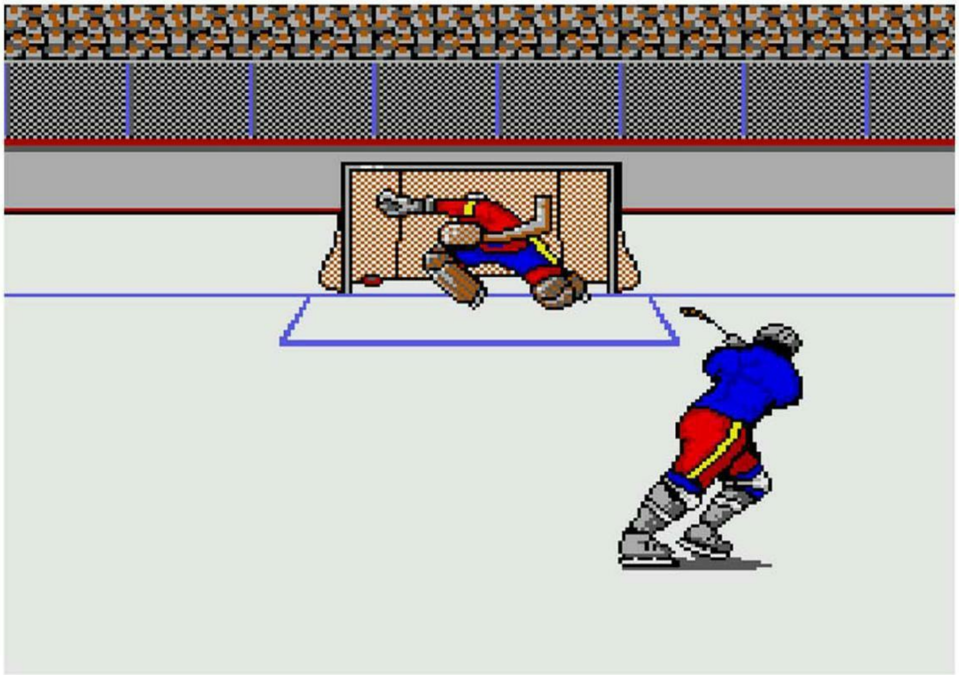

SPORTS
SEGA
Slap Shot™

At the start you have your choice of an exhibition or 8 team tournament mode. The exhibition is self explanatory, but the tournament mode has three different difficulty tiers. Unlike a lot of sports games, the teams change depending on which tier you pick. The "A" tier has the traditional powerhouses like Canada, USA, and Germany. Well West Germany, this was still before the reunification. When you get to the "C" tier the competition gets a little weaker, as one of the selectable teams is North Korea. Which, to put it mildly, isn't exactly known for their top flight hockey program. As you scroll through the teams they are graded in three areas, Speed, Power, Balance, which will give you an idea of what your team can do. Of course for the most part the grades are either A or B, so typically it's minor differences between the teams.


PLAYER SELECT
SELECT TEAM
HOLLAND
YUGOSLAVIA
CHINA
HUNGARY
BULGARIA
1 NORTH KOREA
KOREA
AUSTRALIA
MANAGER
TEAM RANK
POWER A
SPEED B
BALANCE B


VS
PLAYER1
COMPUTER





Once the game starts it's fast paced 5 on 5 hockey action. There isn't a check button, but you can continually ram into your opponent until they give up the puck or fall down. The passing is a tad bit spotty, but for the most part it gets the job done. Shooting is pretty straight forward since it seems like every single shot you take is a slap shot (which to be fair, is the name of the game and not totally unexpected). If you happen to score a goal you'll be treated to a dramatic 8-bit animation of your triumph over the goalie (or if you are scored on an animation highlighting your failure). Sadly you'll see your own goalie being abused quite often thanks to the biggest flaw in the game, goalie control.

Every time your goalie appears on screen you automatically gain control of him. This is problematic to say the least since if you are trying to play defense on the guy bringing the puck up the ice, you'll instead be moving your goalie out of position and leaving the net wide open. If you are successful in stopping a shot, you are still going to be left helpless as the puck will more than likely remain just out of reach of your goalie while you have no way of moving your player over to it. After a few shots however your goalie will hold onto the puck so that you can pass it. This isn't a game breaker, but it does get quite annoying.

The only other thing of note is the fighting, which is a button masher. If you aren't prepared for it the computer will get an insurmountable lead before you know what's going on, which is bad for you since the loser of the fight has to go to the penalty box. While that is an incredibly loose interpretation of the rules in my opinion, it does give you incentive to fight hard.

Goalie problems aside, this is still a great 8-bit hockey title that holds up surprisingly well today.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Release Date: 1991
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1

SONIC
THE HEDGEHOG
SEGA
TM

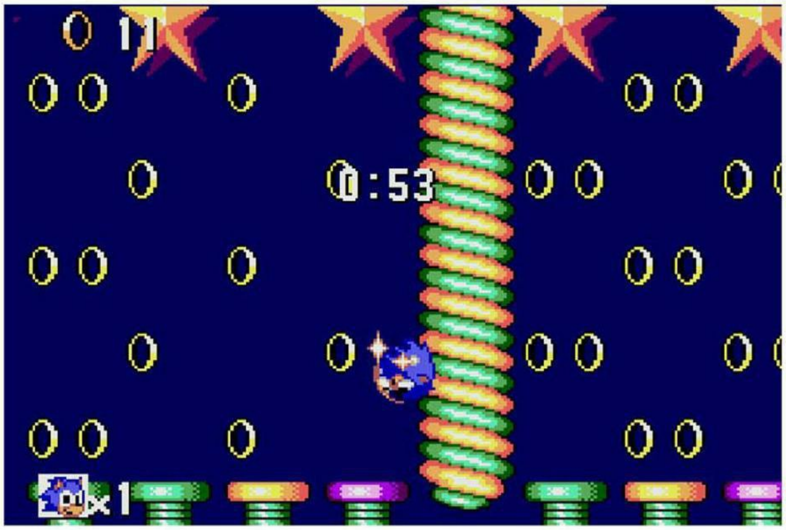
Sonic the Hedgehog is a technically impressive yet scaled down version of the Genesis game.

ACTION
SEGA
Master System
SONIC
THE HEDGEHOG
Plays On : Master System, Master System II and Mega Drive/Genesis With Master System/Power Base Converter

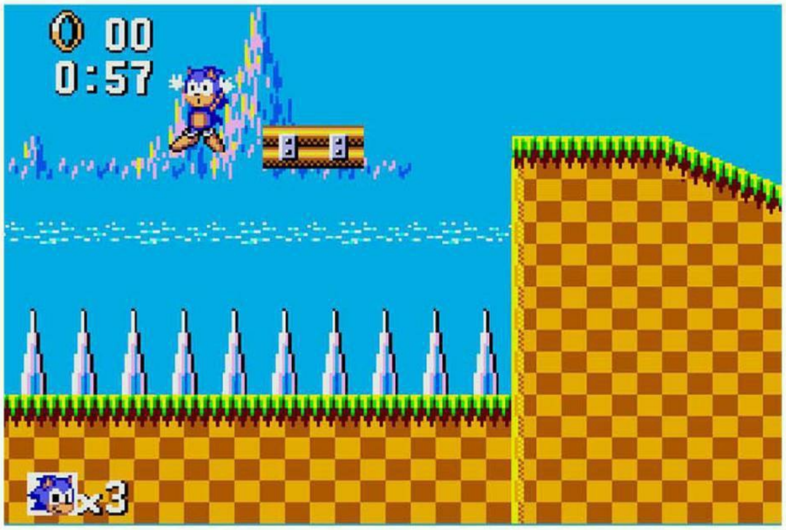
The core gameplay mechanics are intact as you run and jump through levels collecting rings along the way. Getting hit while you have rings causes you to merely lose your rings, although getting hit without any rings results in death.

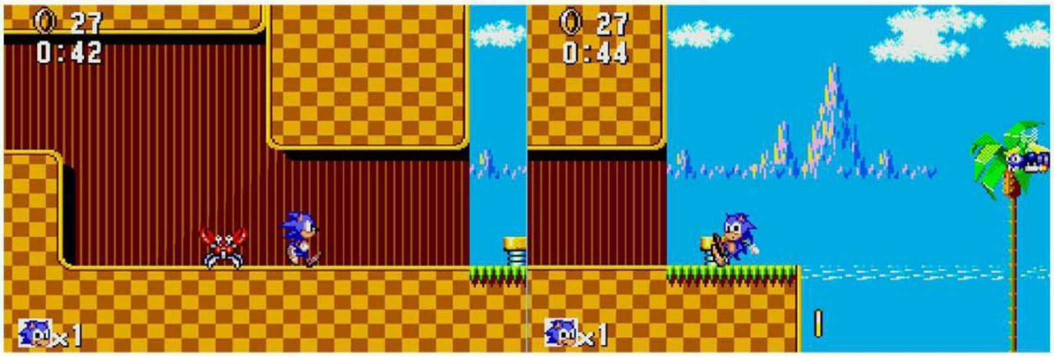
There are a multitude of differences from the Genesis version present here. The most notable is the fact that that when you are hit there is no longer a giant explosion of rings that gives you an opportunity to recollect them. Rather a single ring representing your entire stash flies away from you and is permanently gone. This alone makes the game infinitely more difficult, since often times there are no rings around, so you are constantly in that "your next mistake is going to be your last" mode.

GREEN HILL
x03

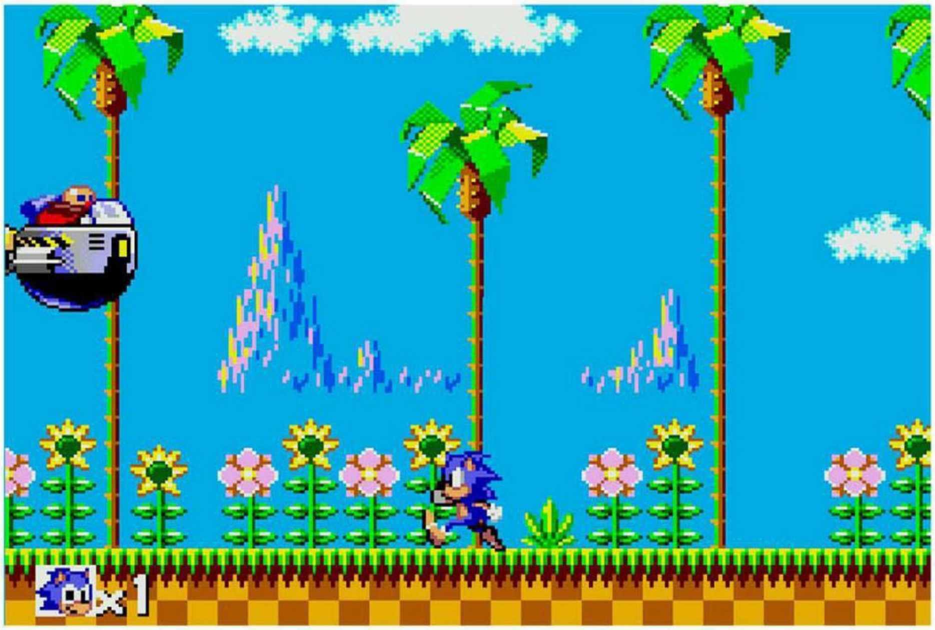


While there are six main levels with three sub levels, again there are major differences. Not only are the levels very basic and short, but there aren't really any branching pathways to explore. Sure there are some levels that require you to not only go in a straight line, but in the end there is typically just one way to reach the goal. Also gone is the sense of raw speed, thanks to the fact that you don't have the ring recapture safety net, you have to take your time going through the levels, which goes against what Sonic is all about. The boss battles are also problematic in that they are on self contained levels, that don't have any rings. So each boss battle is a tense one hit death encounter, which does add to the challenge but certainly not to the fun.





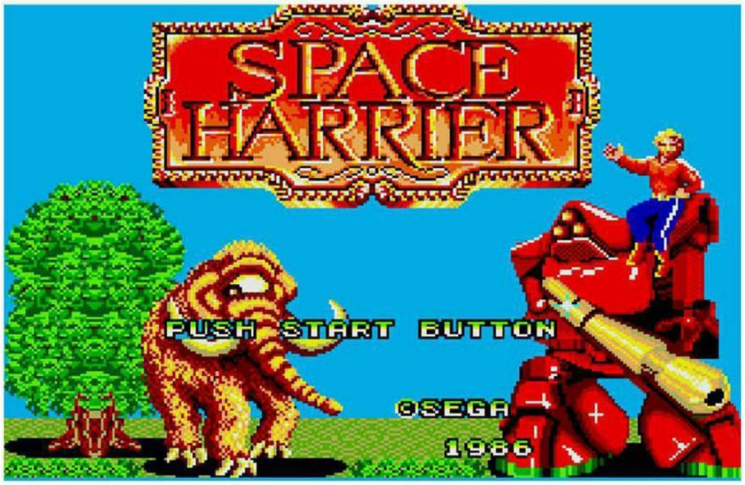
Those changes aside, there is still a lot to behold here. The core gameplay is solid when taken on its own (and not compared to its bigger Genesis brother). The graphics and the music are very good, and thanks to the changes in level design this is a completely different Sonic experience. Just don't go into it expecting the Genesis version. Also, don't expect to find the US version cheaply since it was released at the very end of the Master System lifespan, and as a result is one of the rarest titles on the system.



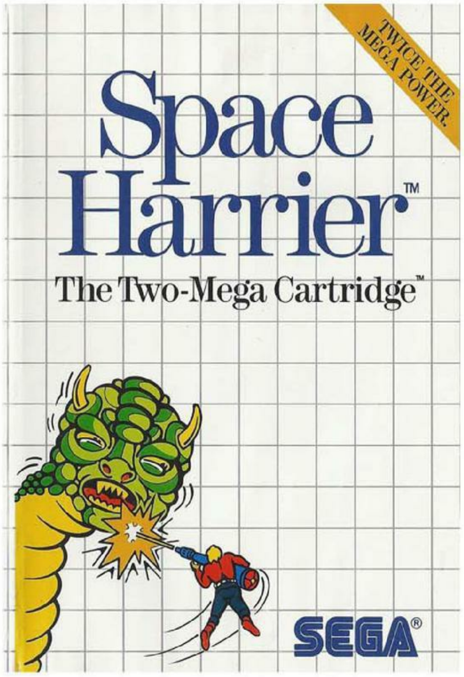
SPACE HARRIER

Release Date: 1987
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1

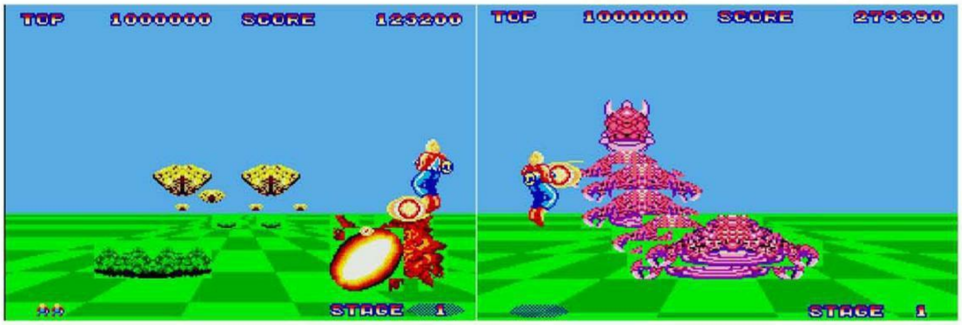

SPACE HARRIER
PUSH START BUTTON
©SEGA
1986

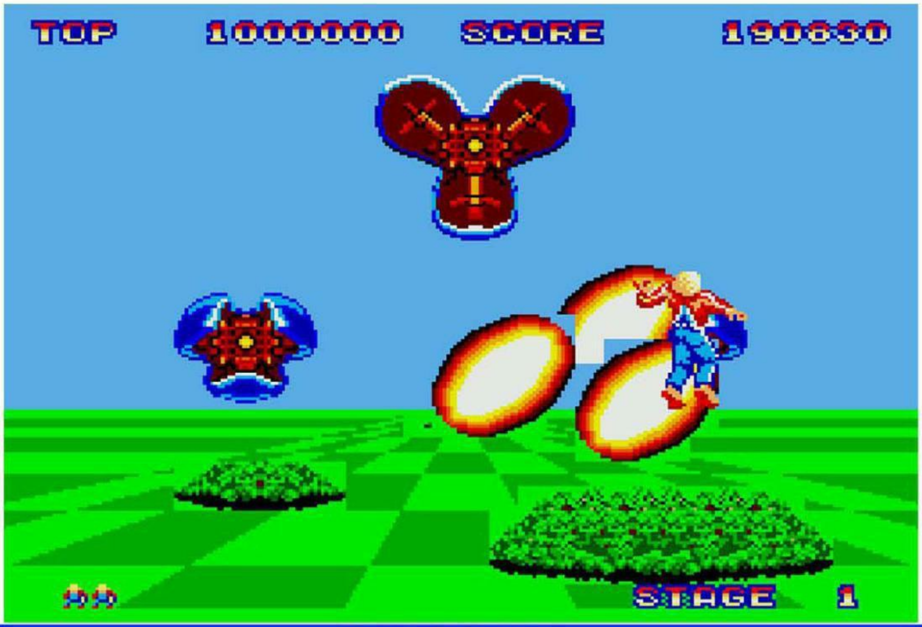
This is a rough looking port of the classic arcade game.

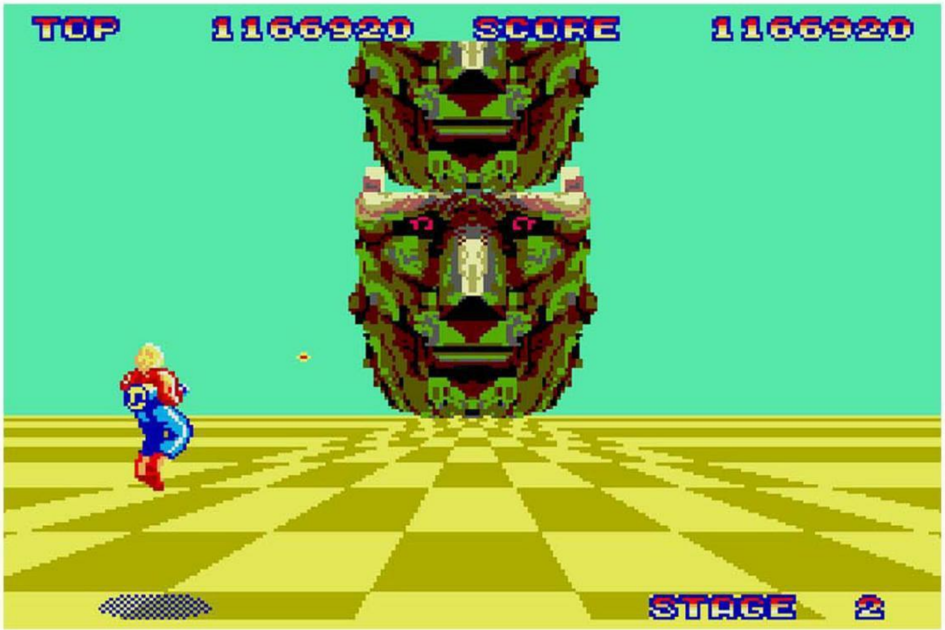

TWICE THE MEGA POWER.
Space Harrier™
The Two-Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

You are a heavily armed jet pack warrior who travels from world to world shooting everything that moves, and well, frankly shoots everything that doesn't move as to boot.

The premise is simple, you have to get from point A to point B by running/flying in a straight line until you reach your destination and face off against a giant boss. Standing in your way are a multitude of enemies that range from space ships, to inanimate objects like trees and rocks, to an incredibly creepy fireball spitting stone face. The end of level bosses are huge and require quite a bit of work to defeat, such as the first level dragon boss that will fly around the screen constantly spitting fireballs at you. If you are successful in defeating him you are rewarded with a trip to the next level, which looks strangely like the level you were just on only with a different name and color pattern.


TOP
1000000
SCORE
123200
STAGE 1
TOP
1000000
SCORE
273990
STAGE 1


TOP
1000000
SCORE
190630
STAGE 1



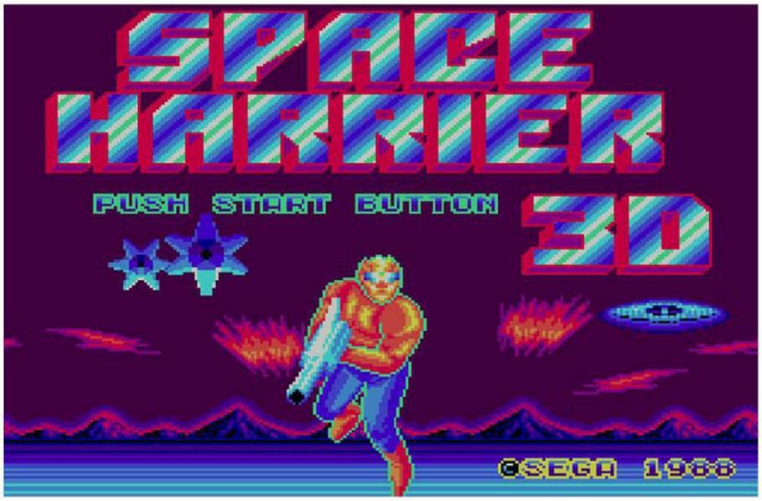
There are eighteen levels to shoot your way through, although most players will never see past level three as it is way to easy to die. This is due mainly to the fact that the bullets the enemies shoot are bigger than you are. Add in the fact that your character will often block the oncoming fire from view, and you can expect to die a great deal. It is nice to see that the hero has a sense of humor however, given that how he has painted a giant smiley face on the butt of his giant gun. At least the dying enemies can get a chuckle as he flies over their soon to be corpses.

The graphics are horribly choppy, like migraine inducing choppy. It almost looks like the game is running at 10 FPS. While it is impressive that they were able to squeeze a game like Space Harrier onto an 8-Bit cartridge, it remains to be seen if it is worth that additional bottle of Advil needed to play it.

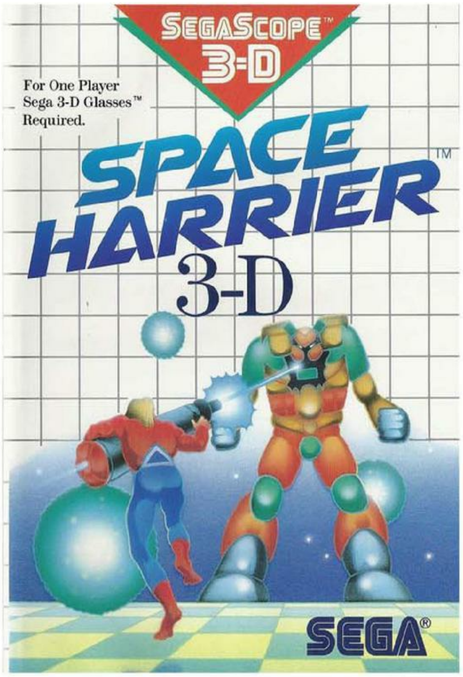
SPACE HARRIER 3-D

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

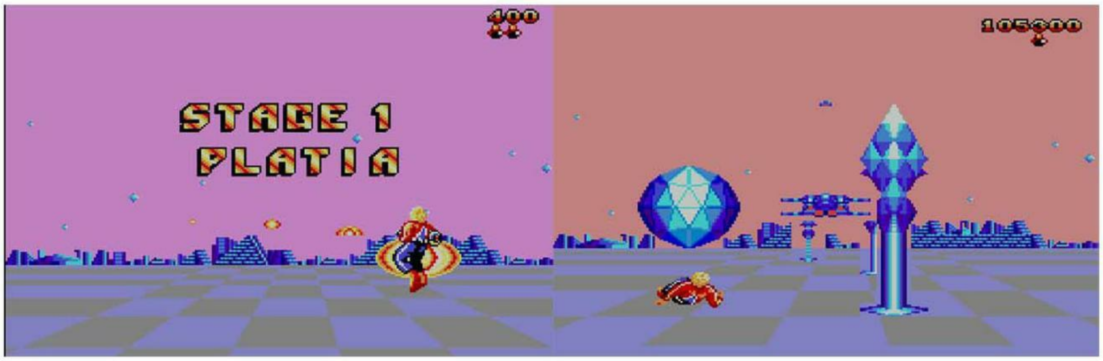
Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1

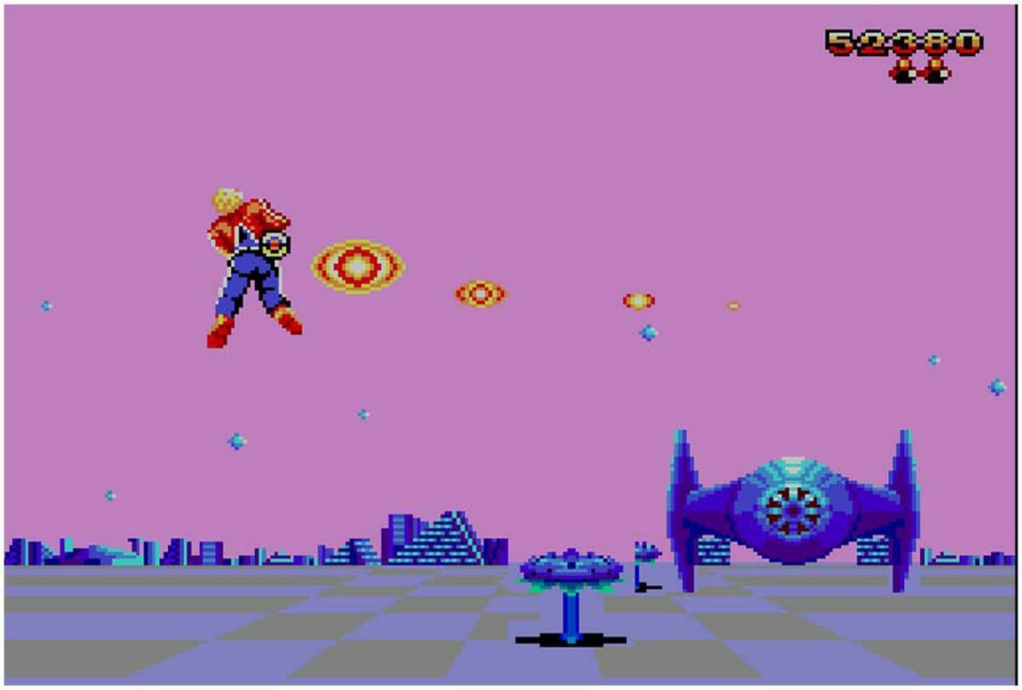

SPACE HARRIER
PUSH START BUTTON
3D
©SEGA 1988

Space Harrier 3-D is, well, a 3-D version of Space Harrier.

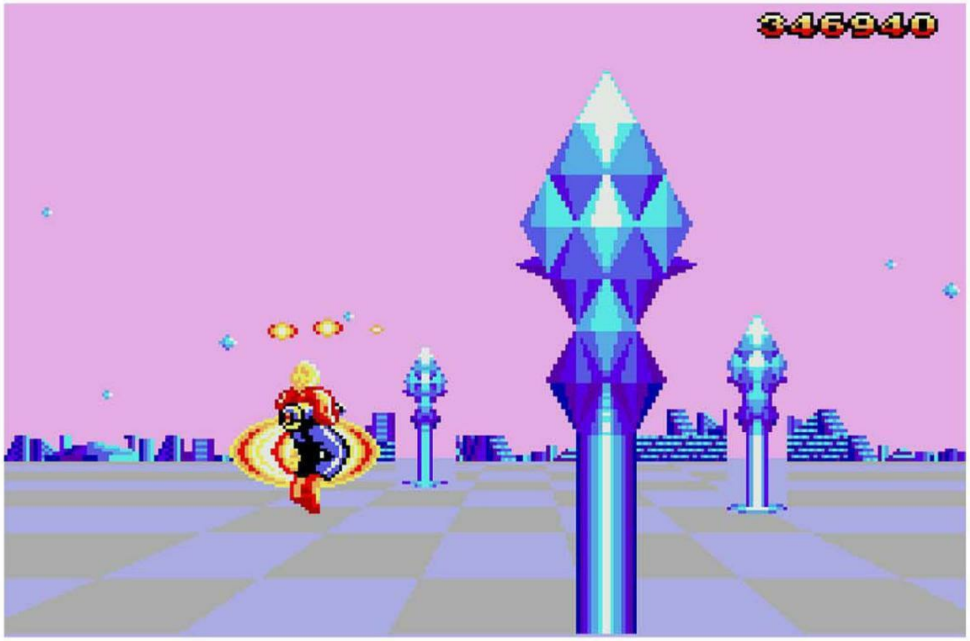

SEGASCOPE™ 3-D
For One Player
Sega 3-D Glasses™
Required.
SPACE HARRIER™
3-D
SEGA®

The games are virtually identical, with the exception of a few new levels. The gameplay is identical with your character running and flying through the air while killing everything in sight, whether it is moving or not. There are a few new enemies, most notable of which is Darth Vader's Tie Fighter from Star Wars. Who knew that Space Harrier was part of the rebel alliance?

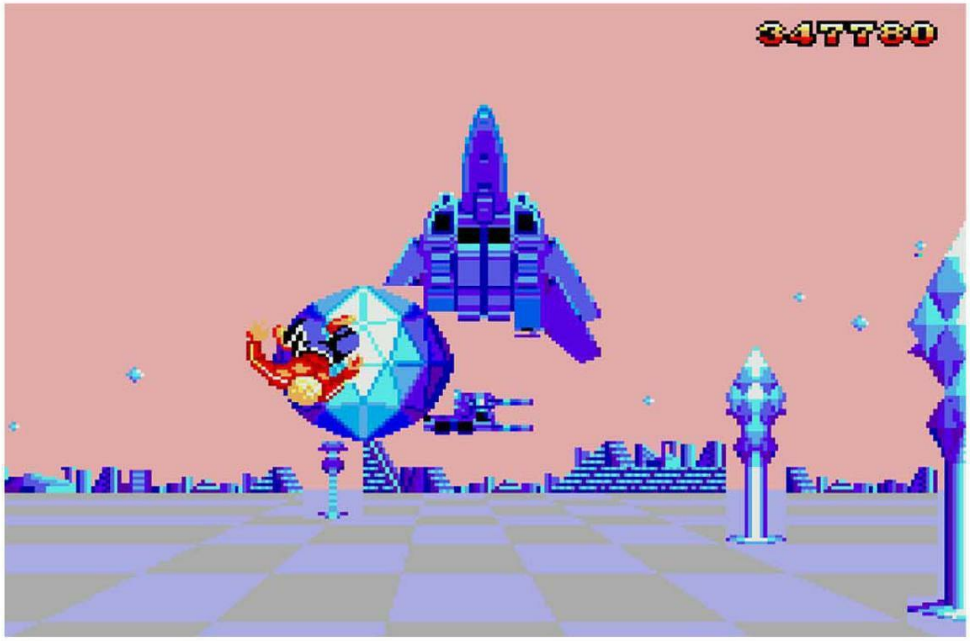




SPACE HARRIER 3-D



The decision between the 3-D and 2-D version is entirely dependent on if you have the 3-D glasses. If you do, then this is the version for you, and if you don't then it's no depth perception for you. Plus without the 3-D glasses it is not only difficult to play, but it migraine inducing.



SPELLCASTER

Release Date: 1989
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade/Adventure
Players: 1

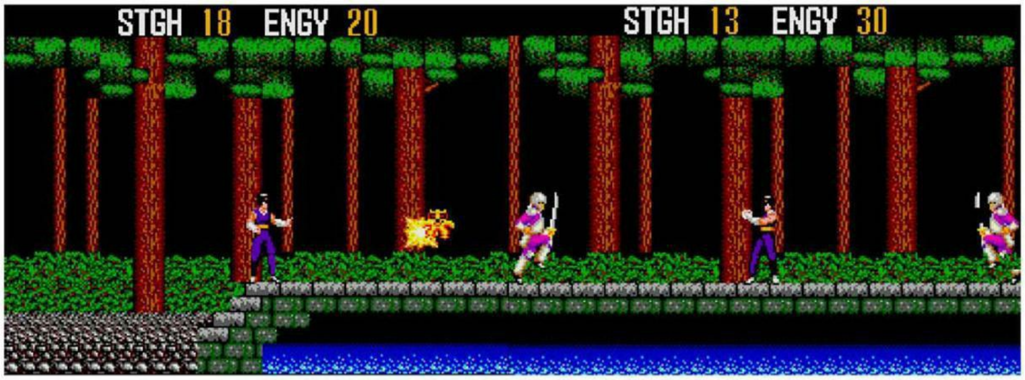
SPELLCASTER

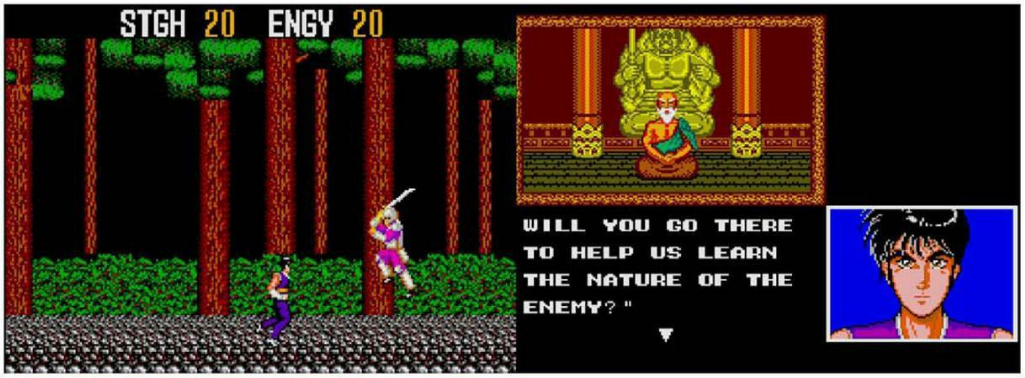
ADVENTURE
ROLE-PLAYING
WITH PASSWORD SAVE!
SEGA®
SpellCaster™

Spell Caster is a nifty game that successfully combines elements from arcade style action games and point and click adventure games.

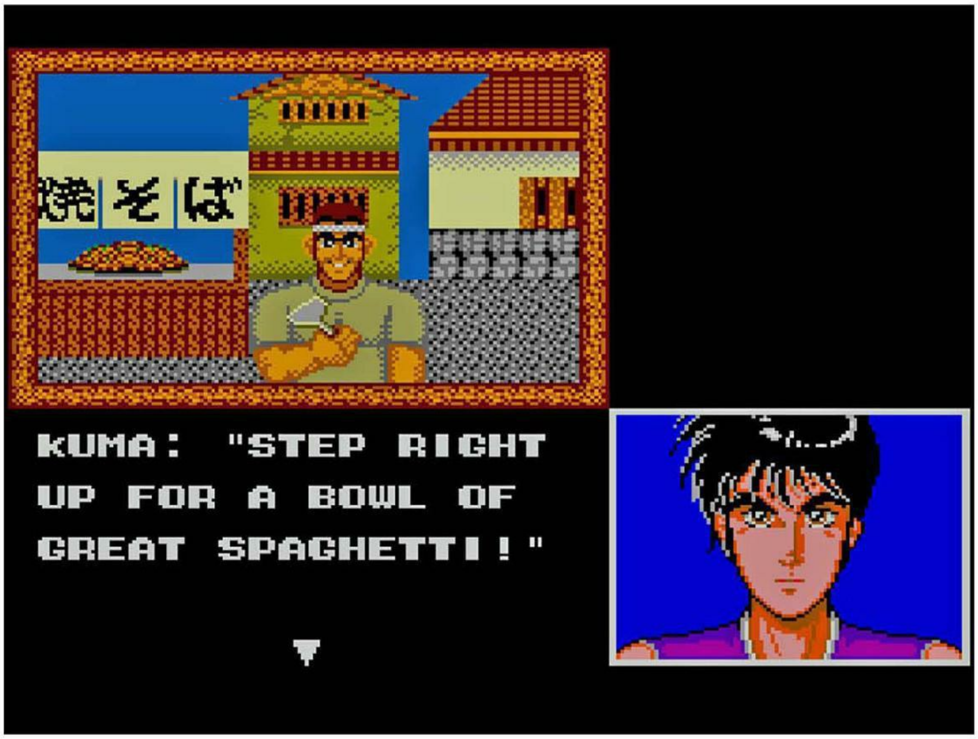
You are Kane, a young spell caster that has been summoned to the Summit Temple to receive his quest, one that will take him to far off lands to fight untold numbers of enemies and ultimately to save the world. Or to put it another way, basically the same story from every video game in the history of the world.

Unlike the bulk of those other games though, Spellcaster does a great job of telling the story. Between each action segment there is an interactive comic book style adventure section. Here the story is advanced through dialogue and through your actions of investigating the scene at hand. To give you an example of how this works, early on you are presented with a small city street scene, with nothing more than a noodle stand visible. Upon investigating the noodle stand you are greeted by a citizen who gives you information about what is going on in town, and who tells you that there are bad things happening at the town shrine.





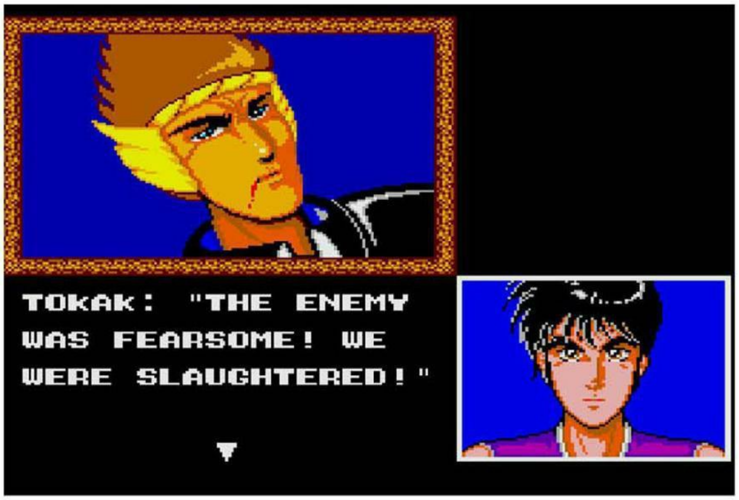
WILL YOU GO THERE TO HELP US LEARN THE NATURE OF THE ENEMY?"



KUMA: "STEP RIGHT UP FOR A BOWL OF GREAT SPAGHETTI!"

This opens up the shrine as a location that can be visited. While this is done in a very linear and limited fashion, it is still a nice addition to the gameplay, and is among the first genre hybrids on a home console.

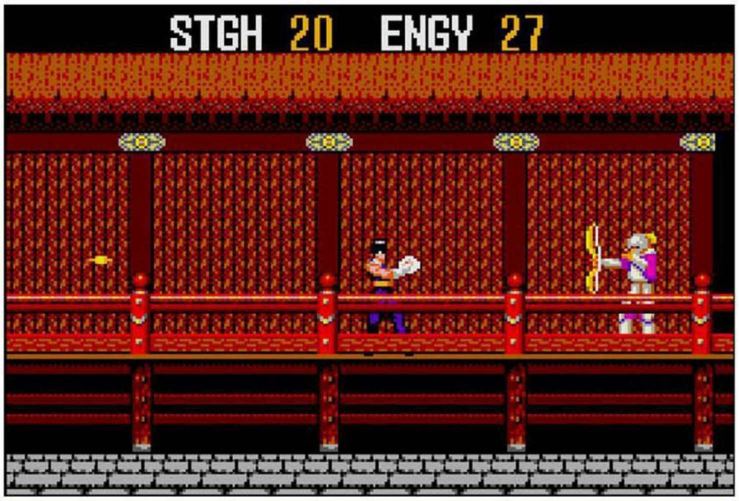
The action segments are a little rough around the edges, but still hold up fairly well. Kane has a standard fireball to attack enemies with, and can do so in one of two ways. If you hit the button rapidly he will throw out small fireball after fireball, but if you hold the attack button down he will charge up and unleash a powerful blast that will devastate everything in its path. Along your journey you can acquire new weapons which make your normal shot stronger (the first power up allows your shot to kill two enemies rather than one).



TOKAK: "THE ENEMY WAS FEARSOME! WE WERE SLAUGHTERED!"

There are some problems with the action that hold the game back from being a true classic. For starters you can't shoot a fireball while crouched. This is an issue because there are several enemies that are low to the ground and can only be hit when they leap up to attack you. The other main problem is that in later levels there are difficult jumps over bottomless pits that must be made. Thanks to your character being slow and not exactly nimble, poor Kane will end up falling to his death more often than successfully landing the leap.

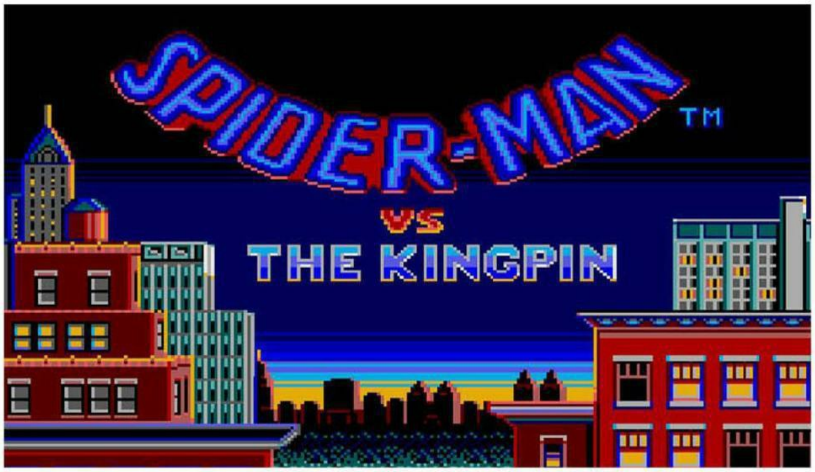
There are over a dozen locations to explore, many enemies to fight your way through, and thankfully a password system to allow you to take a break from playing one of the best games on the Master System.



SPIDERMAN

Release Date: 1991
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1

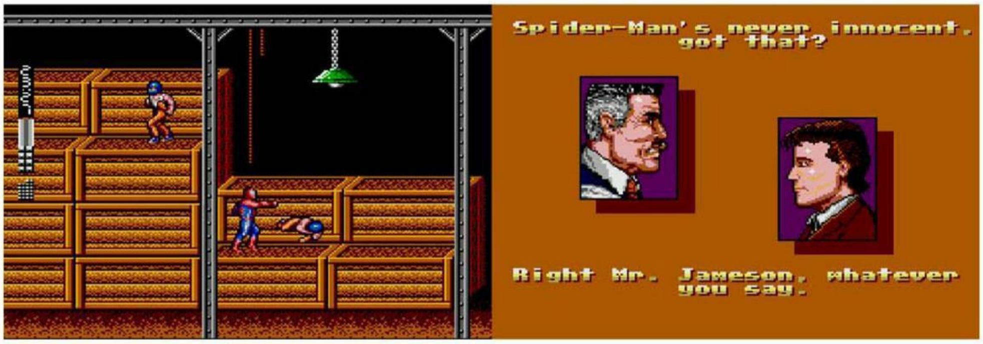

SPIDER-MAN TM
VS
THE KINGPIN

Spiderman is a standard run of the mill arcade style action game that would have been completely overlooked if it weren't for the fact that it featured Spiderman.

ACTION
Plays On: Master System,
Master System II and Mega Drive/Genesis with
Master System/Power Base Converter
SEGA
SPIDER-MAN

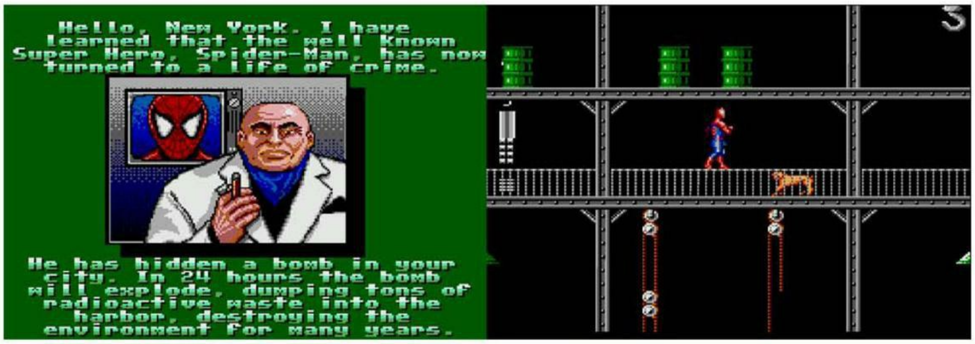
The setup is of the typical comic book variety, as the Kingpin has framed Spiderman for hiding a ticking time bomb somewhere in New York City and is encouraging everyone to become vigilantes in order to bring him to justice. In order to clear his name and prevent a bomb from detonating, your friendly neighborhood web slinger must venture deep into the seedy underbelly of the city, which includes exotic locations like a warehouse and the sewers. There he will face off against a dull variety of generic henchmen before his "Spidy sense" goes off, alerting him to a boss battle against a recognizable villain such as Doc Ock or the Lizard. Once defeated they will reward Spidy with a key that will help him defuse the bomb, as well as a handful of insults just for good measure.

The biggest obstacle standing in your way isn't the bosses or the standard issue henchmen, rather it is Spiderman himself. You have two basic attacks at your disposal, a punch/kick or throwing a web out to stun the enemy. In the Genesis port of the game there are three buttons on the controller, so each attack has their own button, on the Master System version however they share a button.



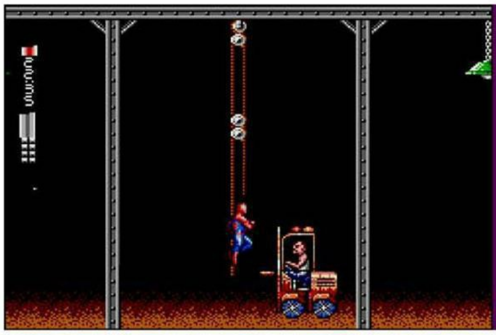
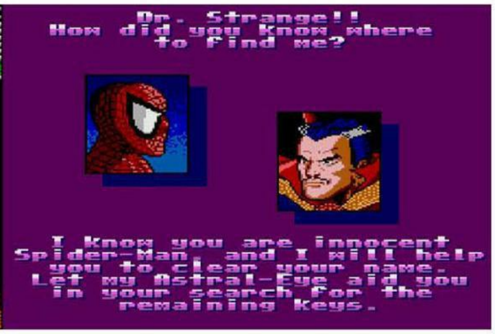
Spider-Man's never innocent, got that?

Right Mr. Jameson, whatever you say.

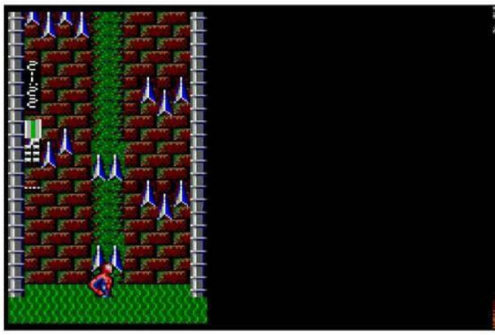
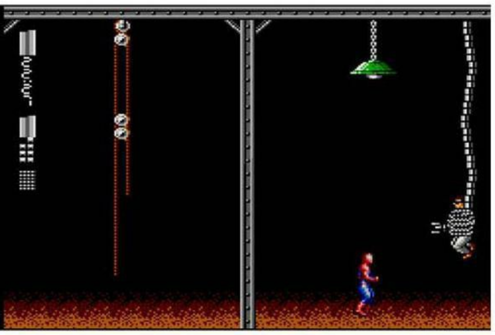


Hello, New York. I have learned that the well known Super Hero, Spider-Man, has now turned to a life of crime.

He has hidden a bomb in your city. In 24 hours the bomb will explode, dumping tons of radioactive waste into the harbor, destroying the environment for many years.


Dr. Strange!!
How did you know where
to find me?

I know you are innocent
Spider-Man, and I will help
you to clear your name.
Let my Astral-Eye aid you
in your search for the
remaining keys.



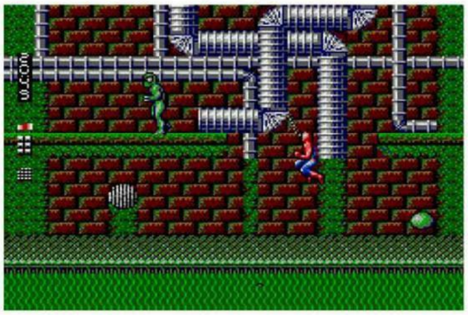
Needless to say this leads to some difficulty and frustration. In order to throw a web you have to be hitting either left or right while pressing the attack button, which sounds good in theory until you realize that in order to attack a moving target you have to be moving as well. This is even more infuriating when you take into account the fact that you have a limited supply of webbing.

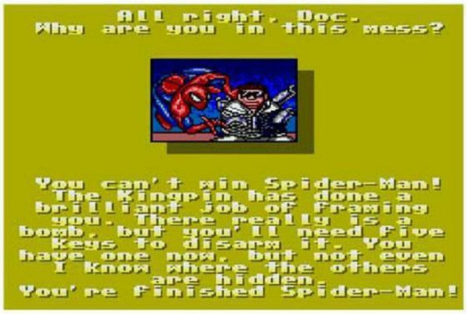
There are other issues that diminish the quality of the gameplay. The collision detection is just way off, resulting in Spiderman punching a henchman in the face repeatedly yet never landing a blow. Then there are the sewer level trap doors that will cause most gamers to throw down the controller and find another game to play. Not only are there multiple trap doors that you have no way of seeing or reacting to, it takes a near act of god to be able to escape them. Even though you can literally climb the walls it is impossible to do so thanks to dozens upon dozens of spikes lining said wall. So you have to use your webs to pull yourself out, however that's easier said than done thanks to the webbing only carrying you to the top of the screen.

Not the top of the pit, just the top of the screen you can physically see. The screen doesn't scroll, it just stops, forcing you to swing from side to side before leaping into the air and wasting another web shot in the hopes that you don't hit a spike which will send you tumbling down to the bottom of the screen again.

One of (if not the only) good thing about Spiderman is that it has a unique timing system. You have 24 game hours in order to find the bomb, which breaks down to about an hour of real time. After each level you have the option of taking Spiderman back to Peter Parker's apartment to rest up and regain health while sacrificing valuable time off your clock. This isn't revolutionary, but it does add a nice sense of urgency to the proceedings.

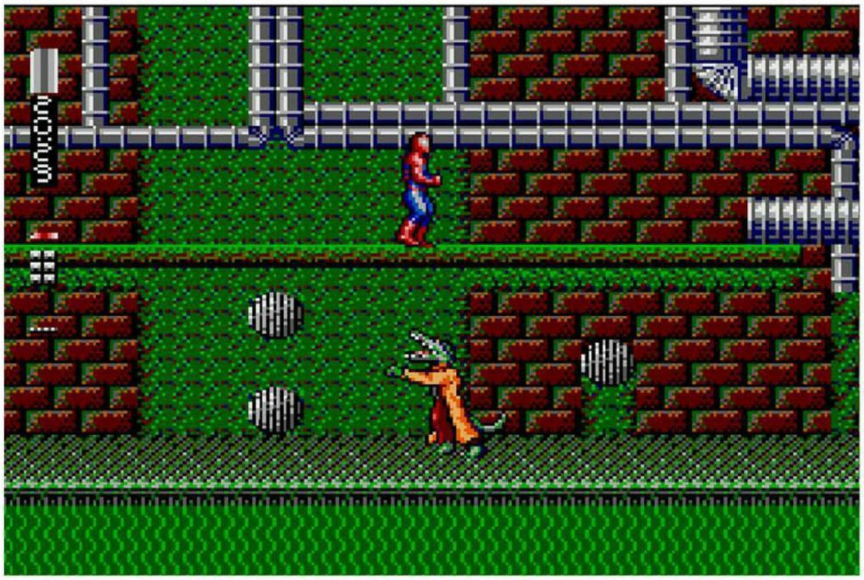
Other than that nifty feature, Spiderman is a completely forgettable action game that pales in comparison to it's bigger Genesis brother.





All right, Doc.
Why are you in this mess?

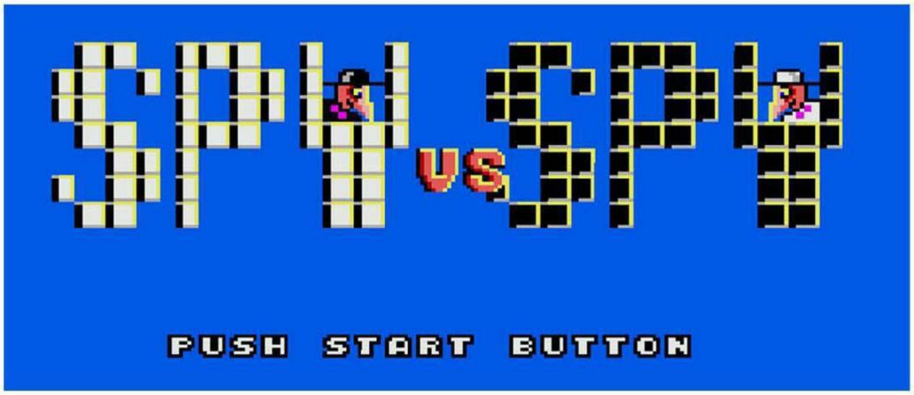
You can't win Spider-Man!
The Kingpin has done a
brilliant job of framing
you. There really is a
bomb, but you'll need five
keys to disarm it. You
have one now, but not even
I know where the others
are hidden.
You're finished Spider-Man!

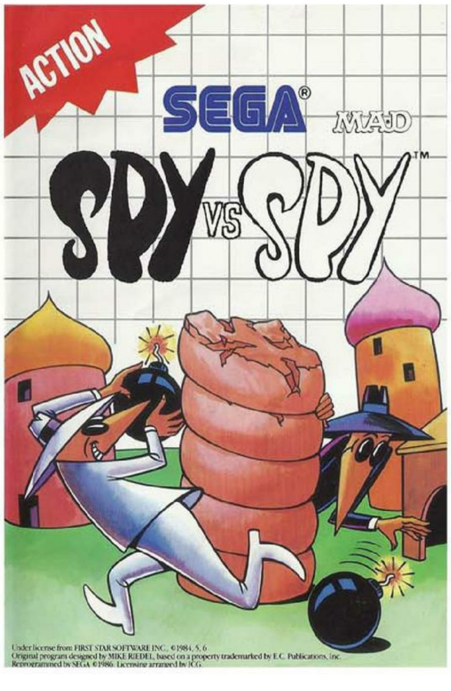


SPY VS SPY

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

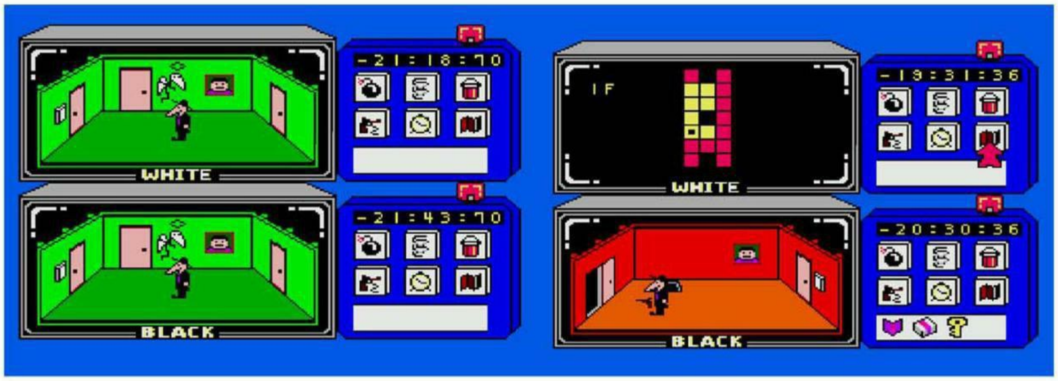
Genre: Action - Puzzle
Players: 1 - 2

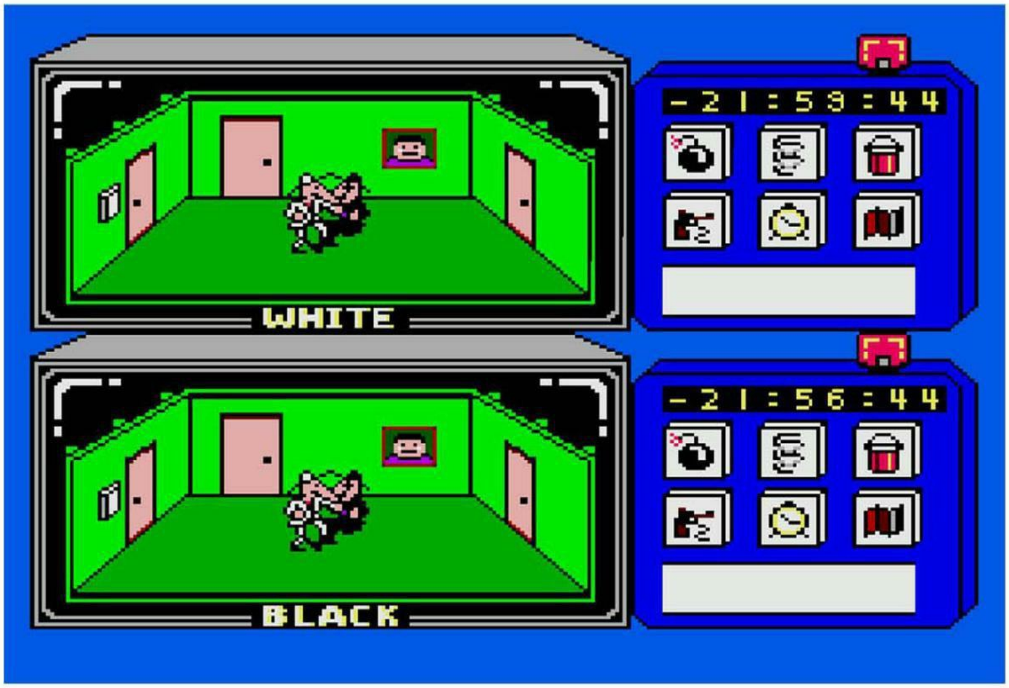

SPY VS SPY
PUSH START BUTTON

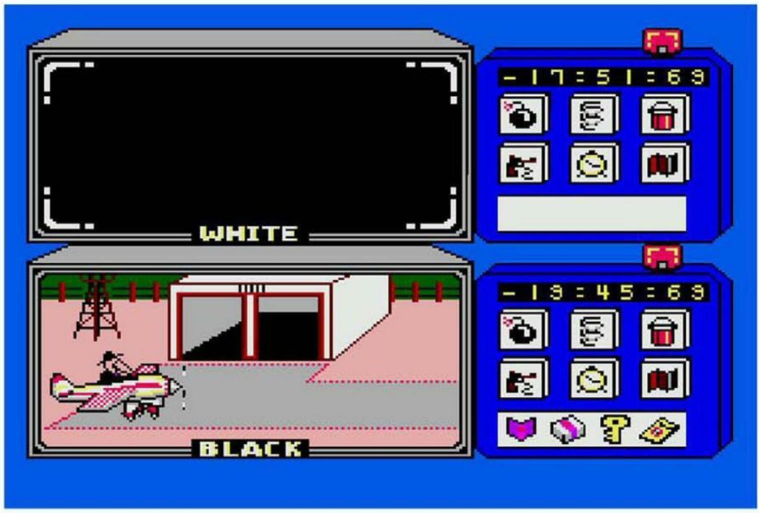

ACTION
SEGA®
MAD
SPY VS SPY™
Under license from FIRST STAR SOFTWARE INC., ©1984, 5, 6
Original program designed by MIKE RIEDEL, based on a property trademarked by E.C. Publications, Inc.
Reprogrammed by SEGA ©1986. Licensing arranged by ICG.

Spy Vs Spy brings the mayhem of the beloved Mad Magazine to the Master System. Unfortunately unless you bring a friend along to play against, you will find yourself really bored really quickly.

You play as the White Spy as you race against the Black Spy around a maze of rooms in search of four key items and a bag to put them in then ultimately to the airport for your getaway. Just like in the Mad Magazine strip, the two spies don't really care for each other, so they have a handful of booby traps that will dispatch their rival rather quickly. And if traps don't work, hand to hand combat will turn your rival into an angel in no time.

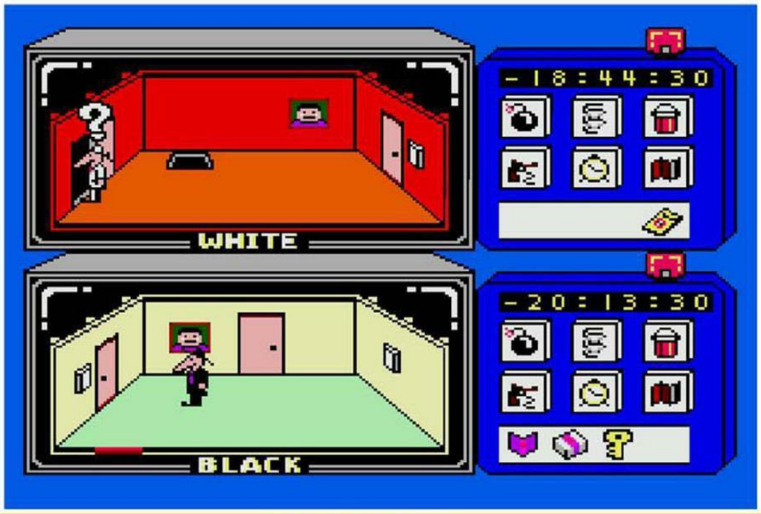

-21:18:70
WHITE
-21:43:70
BLACK
IF
-19:31:36
WHITE
-20:30:36
BLACK


-21:59:44
WHITE
-21:56:44
BLACK



Other than the occasional trap going off, the game amounts to little more that an elaborate game of hide and seek. Basically you enter a room, look underneath the tv or book case to find an item, then move on to the next room. This is fine in the early going when there are only a handful of rooms, but in the later levels this becomes very tedious. How tedious you ask? Well imagine that you just moved and you had to scour your house for four random items that you needed. Digging through six or eight rooms would be pretty easy huh? Now imagine having to do that in an eight story house with dozens of rooms on each floor. Yeah, doesn't sound like much fun, does it?

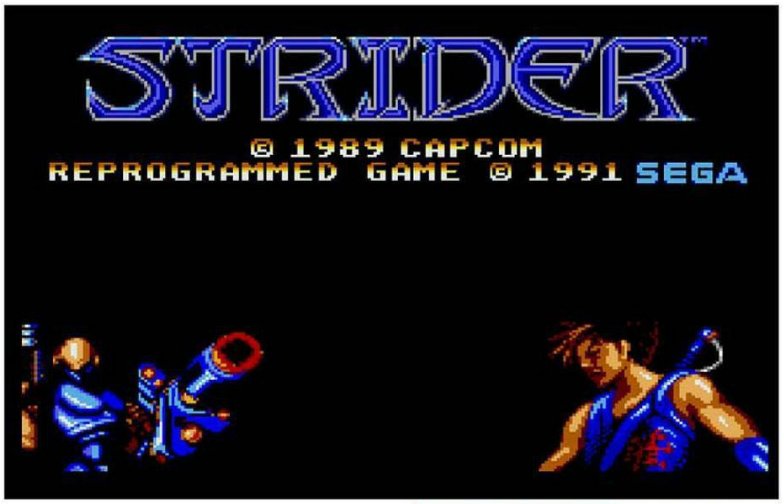
And that's all there really is to it. No special modes, no variety, nothing more than just tedium and the occasional spy vs spy slap fight.

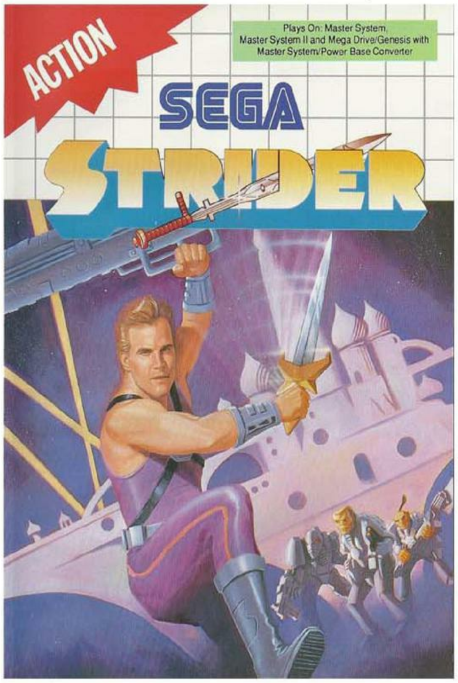


STRIDER

Release Date: 1991
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1

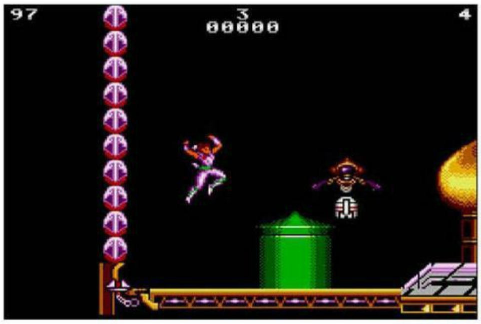

STRIDER
© 1989 CAPCOM
REPROGRAMMED GAME © 1991 SEGA

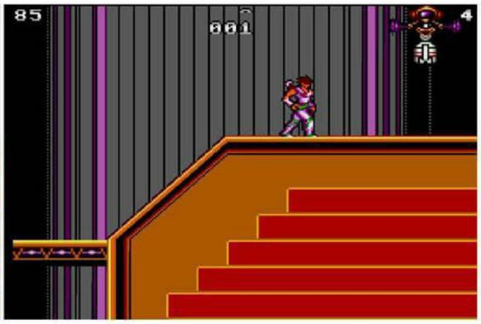

ACTION
Plays On: Master System, Master System II and Mega Drive/Genesis with Master System/Power Base Converter
SEGA
STRIDER

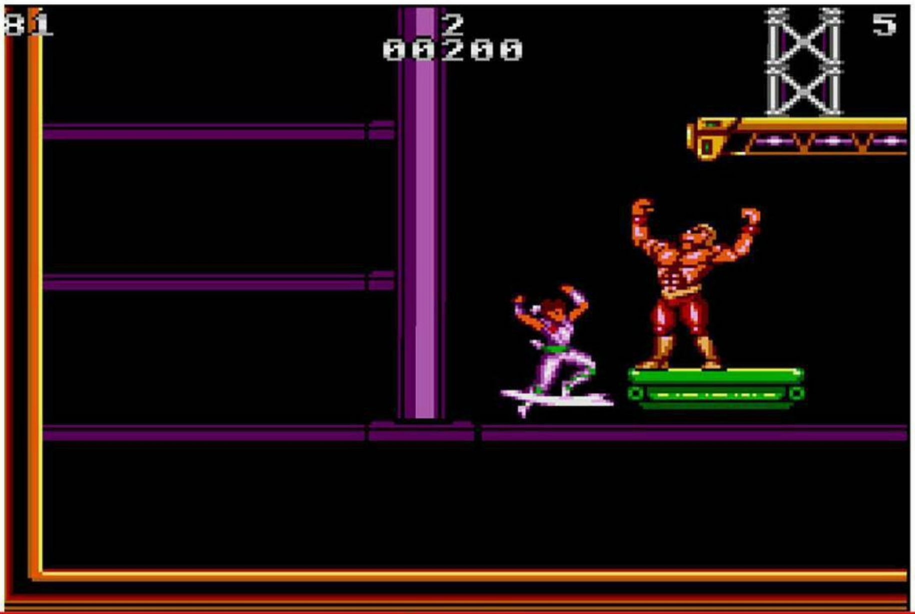
Strider is a very poor attempt to capture the action and excitement of the arcade game. Heck, it struggles to capture even a fraction of what the Genesis port could.

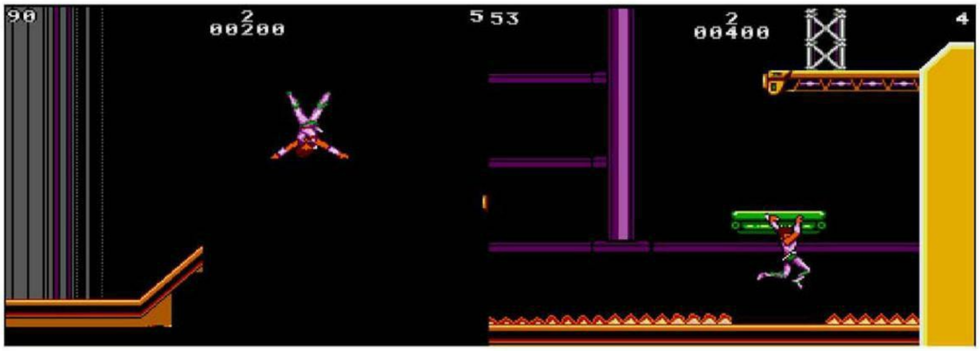
The basic gameplay is intact, to an extent. In both the arcade and Genesis versions you run, jump and slash your way through endless throngs of bad guys. In this version however you jog, float, and slash your way through a single guy at a time.

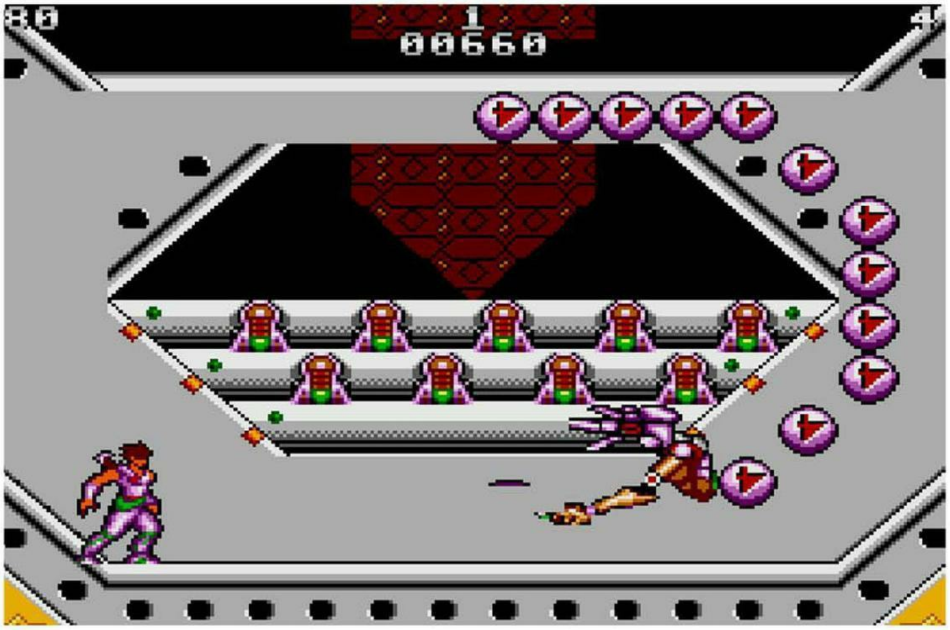
The lack of enemies is only the beginning of the issues here. The biggest problem is the speed of the game, in that it's about as slow as you can get and still be considered a game. You know you are in trouble when the game has slowdown issues and there is only a single enemy on screen. When you get to the boss the flicker and slowdown becomes so bad that the game is virtually unplayable. The only way to defeat the boss is to keep jumping while swinging your sword and hope that he blows up before you do.



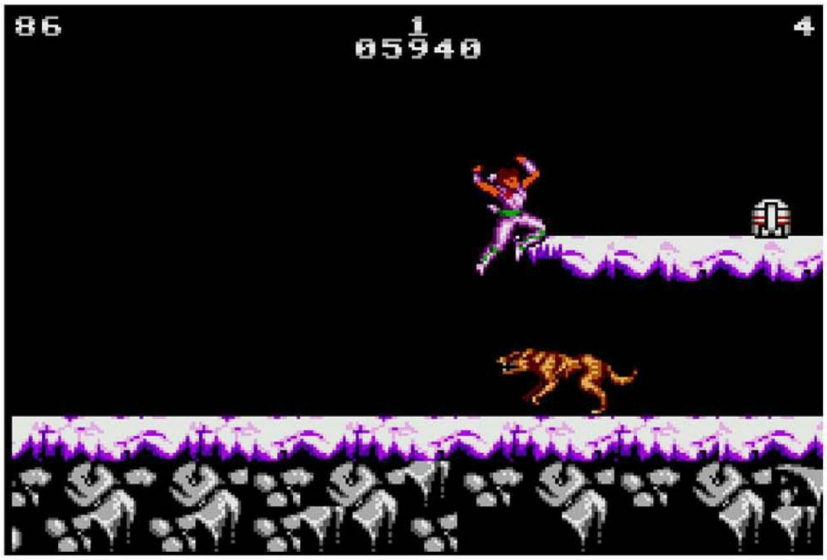






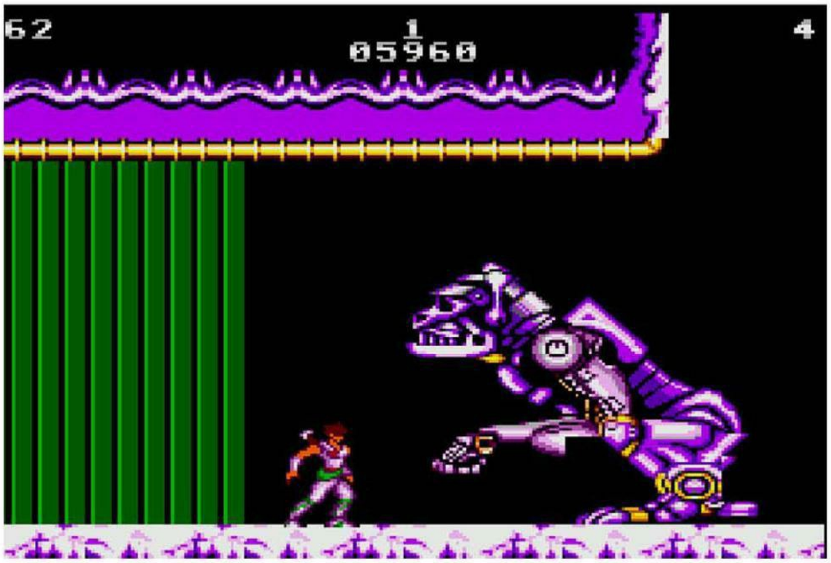


Speaking of blowing up, you'll be doing this quite often for a multitude of reasons. While everything in the game moves at a snails pace, the bullets are as fast as, well, bullets. An enemy can be on the other side of the screen, fire, and still be able to hit you even if you hit jump the moment he fired. The jump is another problem area as it will do a good job of killing you. Unlike just about every other game where you jump in an arc, there is a magical invisible barrier that you slam into when you leap into the air. This means if you are trying to jump an enemy or a bottomless pit, if you jump too soon you'll gently float down to your doom rather than clear it. On the plus side though you do look quite elegant with your arms spread out like an eagle.



The enemies are quite varied, ranging from Soviet winter soldiers to gun turrets to wolves. The bosses and mini bosses have a nice variety as well, including a giant mechanical gorilla, a huge flying hammer and sickle wielding metal snake, and of course Ivan Drago pumped up on steroids. None of them have power/health bars, so you just have to swing away until the computer decides they have had enough.

With the superior, and cheaper, Genesis version readily available, there really is no reason to play this version.



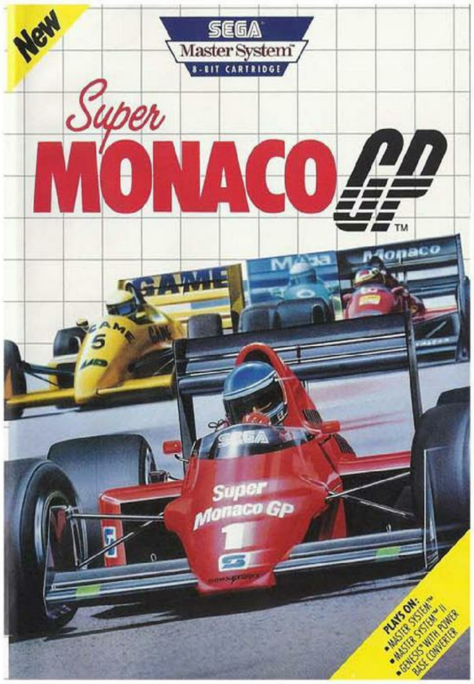
SUPER MONACO GP

Release Date: 1990
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Racing
Players: 1 - 2

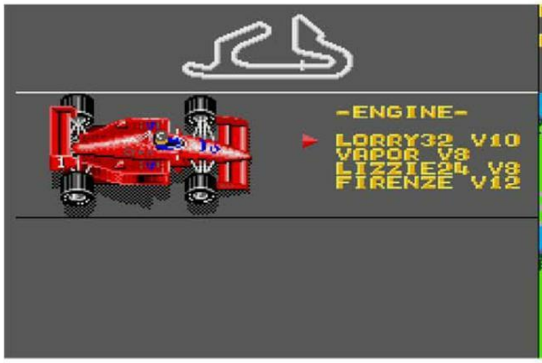
SUPER
MONACO
GP
TM
©SEGA 1990

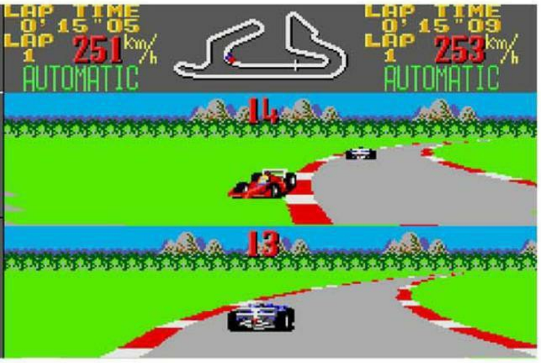
Super Monaco GP has all the makings of a great racing game, but comes up a bit short.

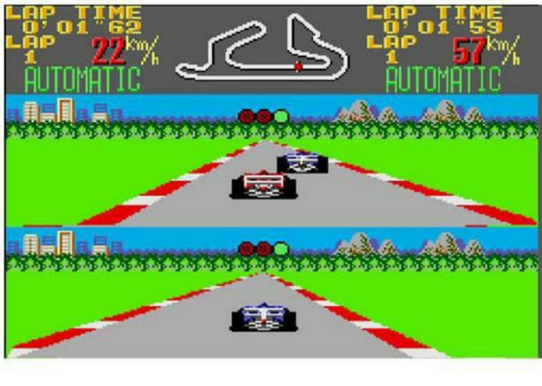

New
SEGA
Master System
8-BIT CARTRIDGE
Super
MONACO GP
TM
PLAYS ON:
• MASTER SYSTEM
• MASTER SYSTEM II
• GENESIS WITH POWER BASE CONVERTER

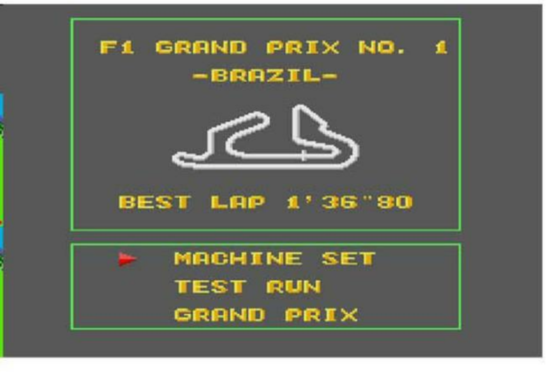
On paper it looks great, as there are sixteen tracks from all around the world. You can fine tune your car, changing everything from the transmission to the engine to the tires and even how big of a wing you want on the back. Sadly though, sometimes things that look good on paper fall apart when put into real life, kind of like thong bikinis, which sound great until you realize they come in XXXL sizes too.

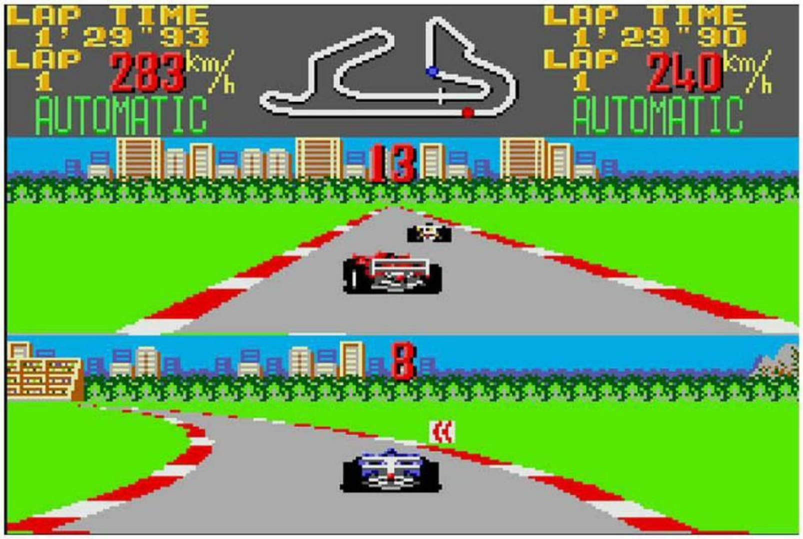
The biggest problem with the game is that it has quite possibly the most ridiculously difficult learning curve of any game during this era. Most games start you out easy so you can get a feel for it. Not Super Monaco GP however, as it starts out by throwing you right into the shark infested deep end. Not only is the first track an incredibly difficult one, but your car handles like a 1978 Pinto. Unless you take each curve slow and deliberately you are going to spin out. You don't even have to hit anything to spin out, you'll just randomly do it in the middle of curves. Needless to say that the fact your car can't make even a simple turn saps the fun right out of a racing game.


-ENGINE-
LORRY32 V10
VAPOR V8
LIZZIE24 V8
FIRENZE V12


LAP TIME
0'15"05
LAP
1
251 km/h
AUTOMATIC
LAP TIME
0'15"09
LAP
1
253 km/h
AUTOMATIC
14
13

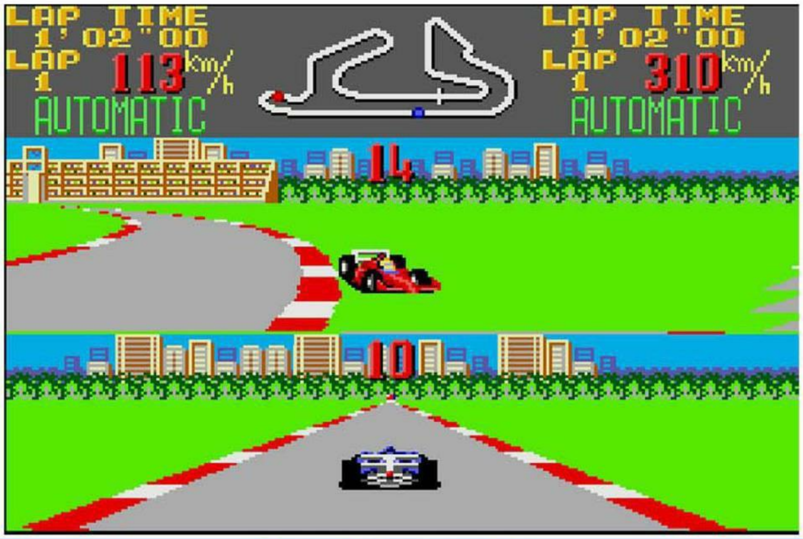

LAP TIME
0'01"62
LAP
1
22 km/h
AUTOMATIC
LAP TIME
0'01"59
LAP
1
57 km/h
AUTOMATIC


F1 GRAND PRIX NO. 1
-BRAZIL-
BEST LAP 1'36"80
MACHINE SET
TEST RUN
GRAND PRIX


LAP TIME
1'29"93
LAP
1
283 km/h
AUTOMATIC
LAP TIME
1'29"90
LAP
1
240 km/h
AUTOMATIC
13
8

As if this wasn't enough of a downer, there is a computer controlled car that takes up half the screen. If you take two seconds while waiting for your spun out car to reset, you'll see them taking every corner with ease. And you'll also see them on the verge of lapping you by the halfway point of the race. It would have been nice if the split screen could have been turned off, but alas it is always on. Even in practice mode when you are out on the track alone there is still a split screen.

If you are a racing buff who likes realism in their games then you might enjoy this. However if you are looking for a racing title to have some fun with, this isn't it.


LAP TIME
1'02"00
LAP
1
113 km/h
AUTOMATIC
LAP TIME
1'02"00
LAP
1
310 km/h
AUTOMATIC
14
10

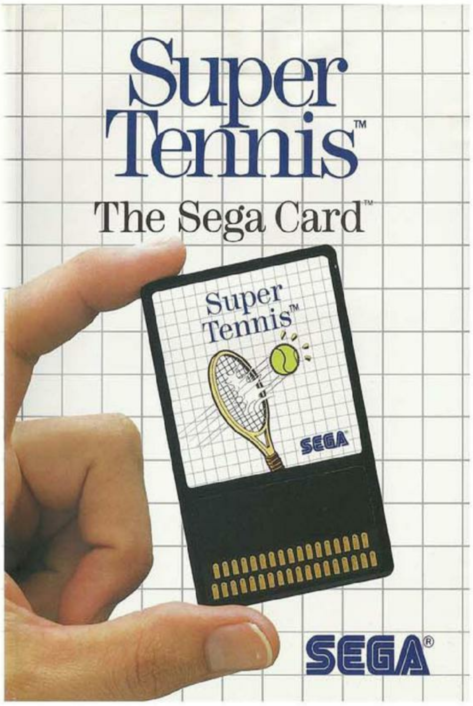
SUPER TENNIS

Release Date: 1986
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Sports - Tennis
Players: 1 - 2

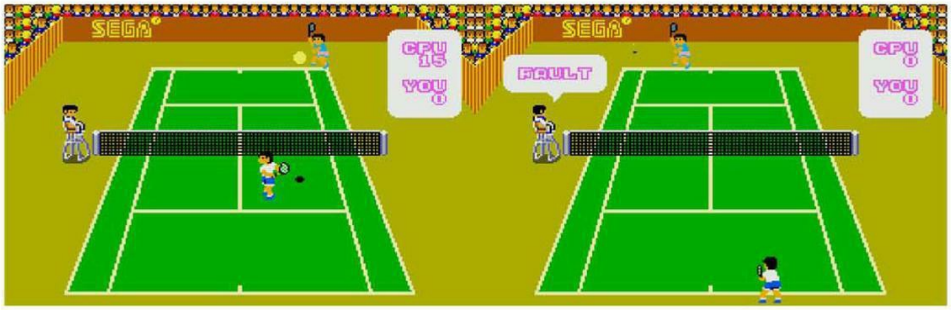
Super
TENNIS

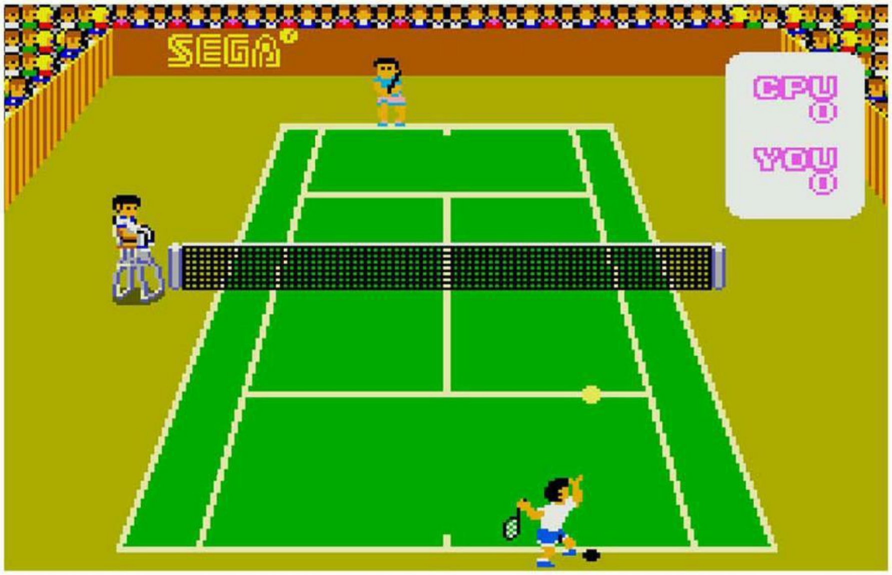
Super Tennis is a less than super version of tennis. Seriously, it's like watching a tennis match on a DVR and hitting the slow motion button.

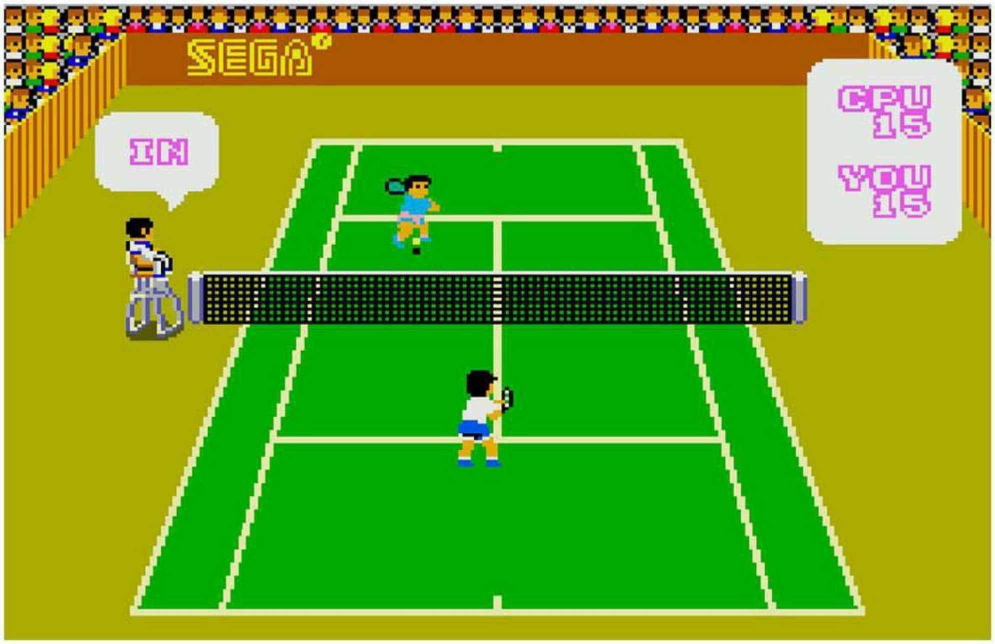

Super
Tennis™
The Sega Card™
Super
Tennis™
SEGA
SEGA®

The characters move slow, the ball moves slow, it even takes you guy an eternity before he decides to toss the ball up to serve. Adjusting the game speed in the menu doesn't really help either, as all it does is increase your guys vertical speed. Did I say increase it? I meant it turns him into the freaking Flash. But only when he's running up and down, try to move him side to side and he'll be as slow as ever, just like the ball.

Want to bring a friend along to join you in this slow moving game? Great, just don't expect to play against each other, as the only option is a doubles game where you take on the computer. Fun. Also, don't expect there to be any tournament or season modes, just a single one on one match against the computer (or two on two if you have a friend).







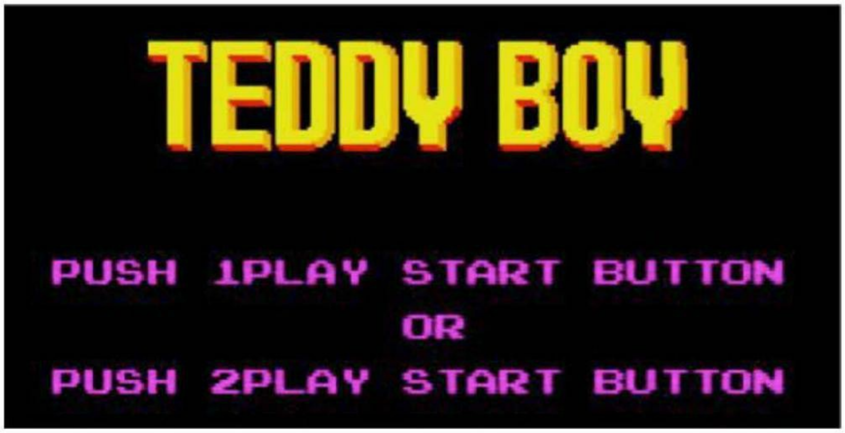
Trying to line yourself up for a shot can be tricky, to it mildly. If you are successful in doing so you don't really have any control over where the ball is going. No trying to paint the line or trying to get your opponent running back and forth. Basically the point involves you politely hitting the ball back and forth with the computer until either you don't get lined up properly, or the computer gets bored and hits it out of bounds. The only real option for success is to run up to the net and continually pepper your opponent with overhand volleys, but even that is difficult and will often times give the computer a point because the ball will hit you in the face.

To put it mildly, there are much better tennis games on virtually every system ever created, so if you are a fan of the sport you should track one of those down.

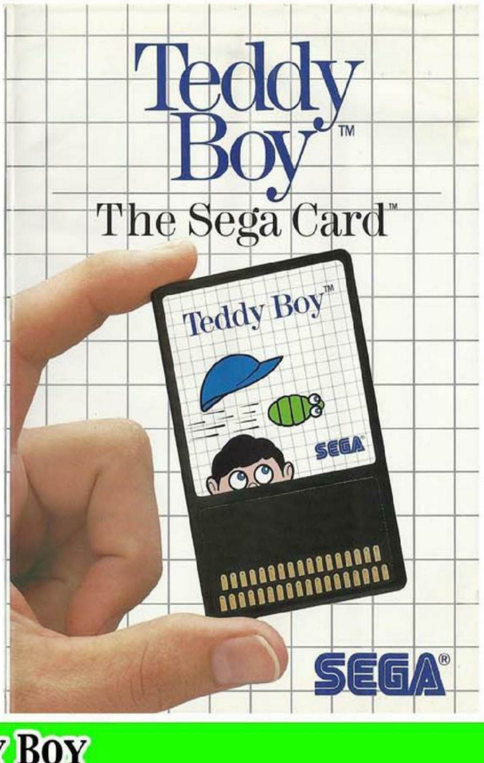
TEDDY BOY

Release Date: 1986
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1 - 2

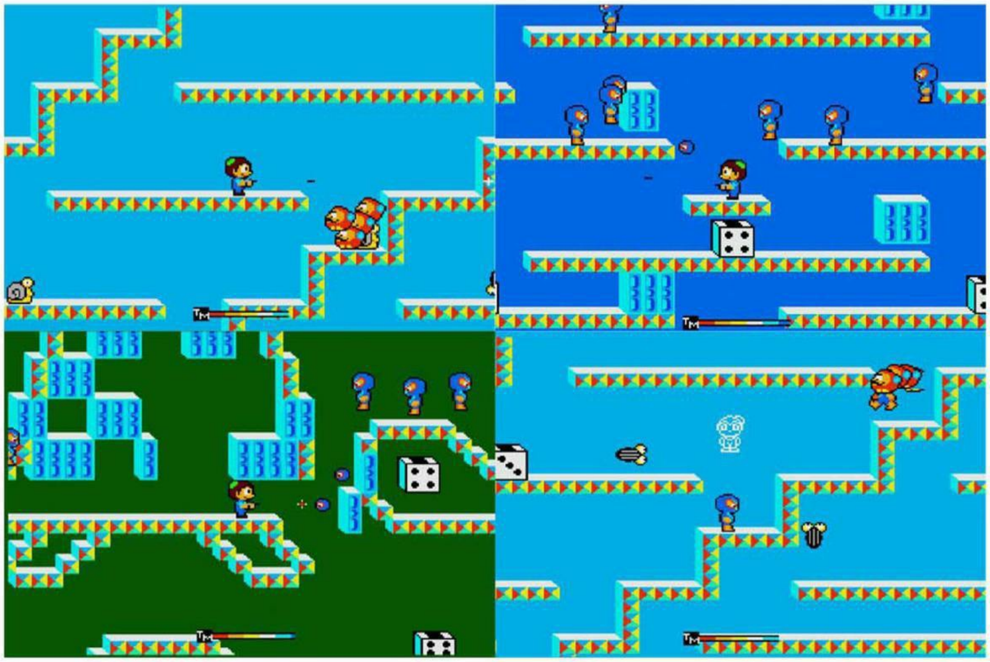

TEDDY BOY
PUSH 1PLAY START BUTTON
OR
PUSH 2PLAY START BUTTON

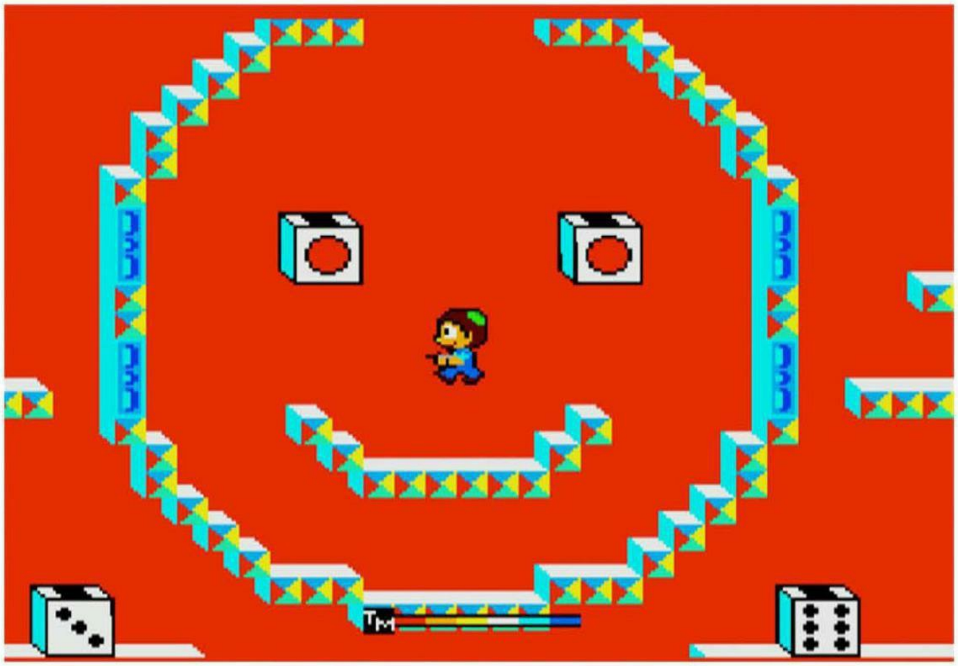
If you ever wondered if there was a game out there that combined a gun toting kid, ninjas, and a healthy supply of beer and smokes, then wonder no more because Teddy Boy combines those together and so much more into a straight up 80's style arcade game in it's purest form. There is no story to finish, no heroine to rescue, only a high score that is in need of eclipsing.


Teddy Boy™
The Sega Card™
Teddy Boy™
SEGA
SEGA®

The setup for the game is simple, you control a kid wearing a yarmulke (or yamaka for those who are lazy and don't want to look that up) as he journeys through fifty mazes shooting everything in sight. The levels are all relatively small infinite loop mazes, meaning that if keep running to the right or jumping up and up you'll end up right back where you started. This has an effect on gameplay as you have to be careful when dropping down to the levels below you as the enemy that is at the top of the screen could very easily be waiting below you as well. It also plays into your strategy as it requires you to think outside the box when trying to track down that last remaining enemy.

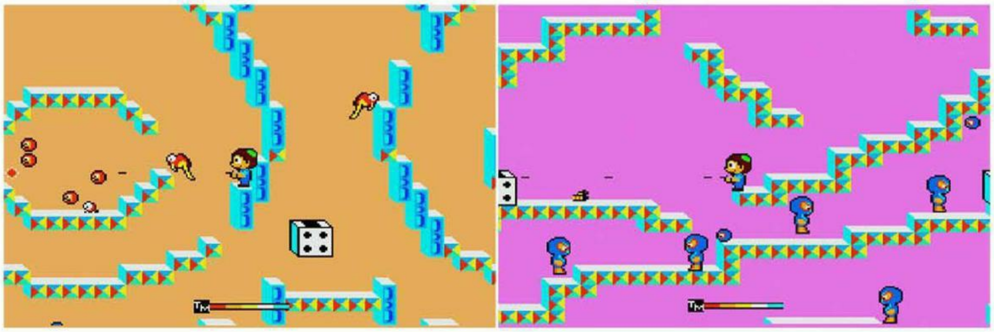
Speaking of enemies, there are a lot of strange and annoying ones to be found here. Of course there are the aforementioned ninjas, who do little more than run and jump around like they are five year olds on a pixie stick bender. There are also flying snails that are only vulnerable at certain times, giant slugs that climb on the ceilings and attack you from above, as well as jumping centipede like creatures that have to be taken out one link at a time. The most annoying of the enemies however are the constantly jumping severed alligator heads that are not only lightning quick but also seem to have a yarmulke seeking radar system since they always find a way to hit you no matter where you are standing.





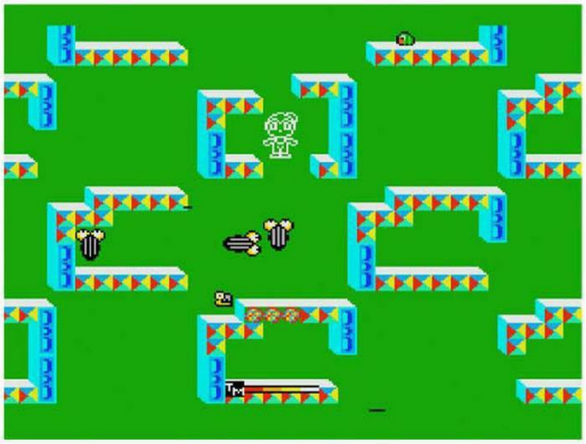
The enemies on each level are a bit of a surprise since none of them are onscreen when the stage begins. When you enter the level you are greeted with several giant dice that are displaying a number (1-6). This number represents how many enemies are going to eventually emerge from that die. This is good in the sense that you know how many more things must be killed before moving on, however it's bad because they always seem to spawn when you are trapped between it and a wall. Seriously, at least once a round I found myself being cornered by a swarm of flying severed alligator heads only to have a ninja spawn out of a giant die causing me to turn into an arm flapping ghost (apparently Teddy Boy is on a budget since he couldn't afford wings, hence the rapid arm waving to carry him up to heaven).

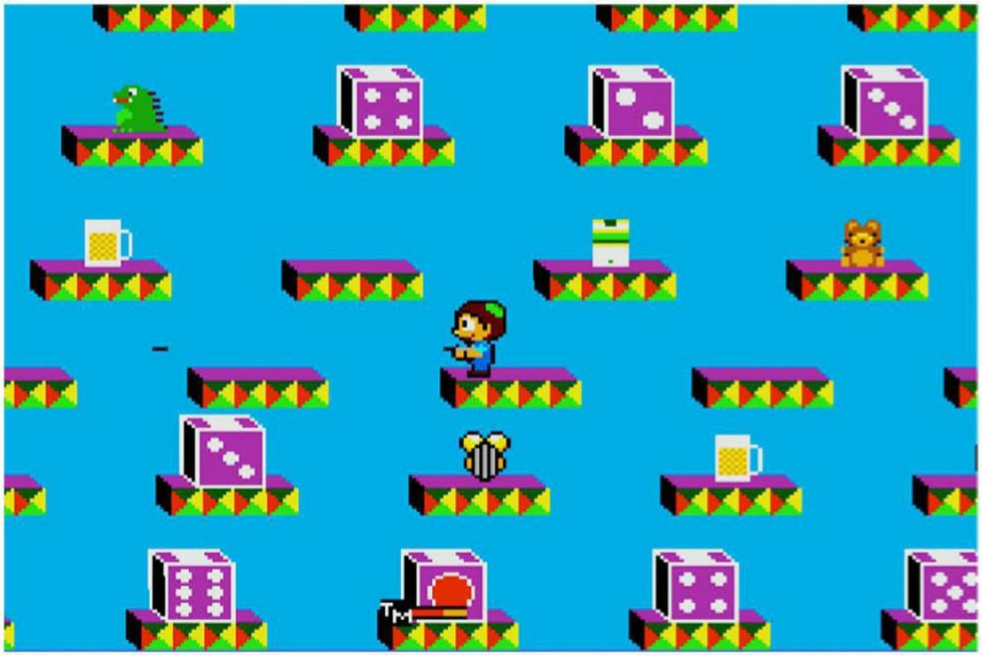
Yes Teddy Boy features one hit deaths, which is pretty standard for the era and genre, but it's not the only way to get a serious afterlife workout. Like a lot of games in this genre there is a timer that when expired causes you to expire. The difference here is that fallen enemies can have an afterlife of their own that consists of devouring time.



When an enemy is shot it turns into a harmless pellet that bounces around the maze. When that happens you have mere moments to fight your way over and retrieve it before it becomes a Langolier (Seriously, they look just like those time eating monsters from the TV movie version of the Steven King novel/really bad TV movie). If you aren't careful and allow enough of them to go to town on your timer expect to be flapping your arms in the near future.

Spread throughout the fifty levels are a handful of bonus levels. Not only do these give you a great opportunity to boost your score, but it is also a window into a much simpler time in video game history. The bonus level is pretty simple in that it is filled with dice that when shot, reveals either a prize that worth points or a Langolier that will eat away at your bonus round timer. Most of the prizes are age appropriate for your yarmulke wearing kid, like high top shoes or a stuffed Godzilla toy, others like a mug of beer and a pack of smokes are probably a bit mature for the young Teddy Boy.





I think it goes without saying that if this were included in a modern game that there would be immediate outcry from parent groups, anti-video game activists, and would pretty much be the lead story on all the 24-hour cable "news" networks (provided of course Lindsey Lohan or Paris Hilton wasn't checking into rehab that week). As it stands though the smokes and booze provide a nice bit of nostalgia to a simpler time before video games were being accused of destroying western civilization.

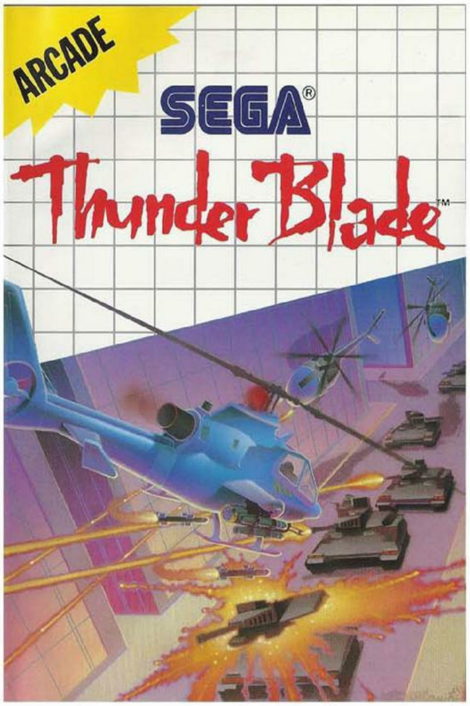
And really, that's about all there is to Teddy Boy. If you are looking for a game with a long shelf life this isn't it. Although if you are looking for another title to add to your weekly old school classic game high score battle royale, this should totally be on your list.

THUNDER BLADE

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Flying Shmup
Players: 1

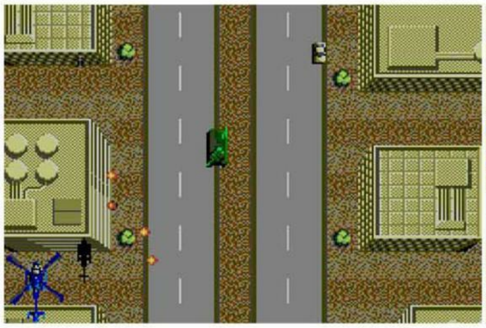
Thunder Blade

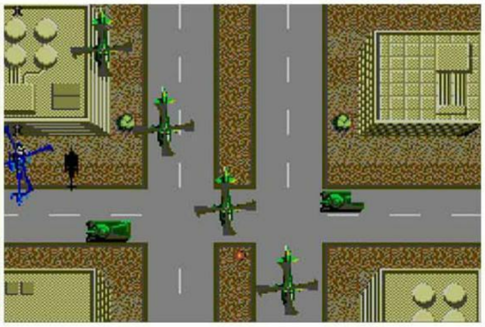

ARCADE
SEGA®
Thunder Blade™

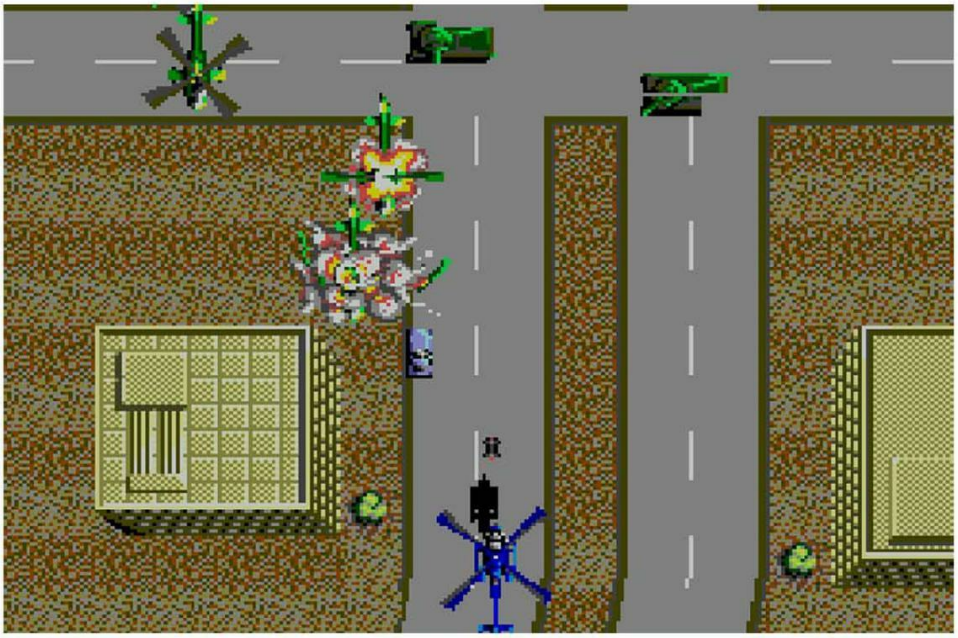
Equal parts flying action and shmup, Thunder Blade is an incredibly tough port of the arcade classic.

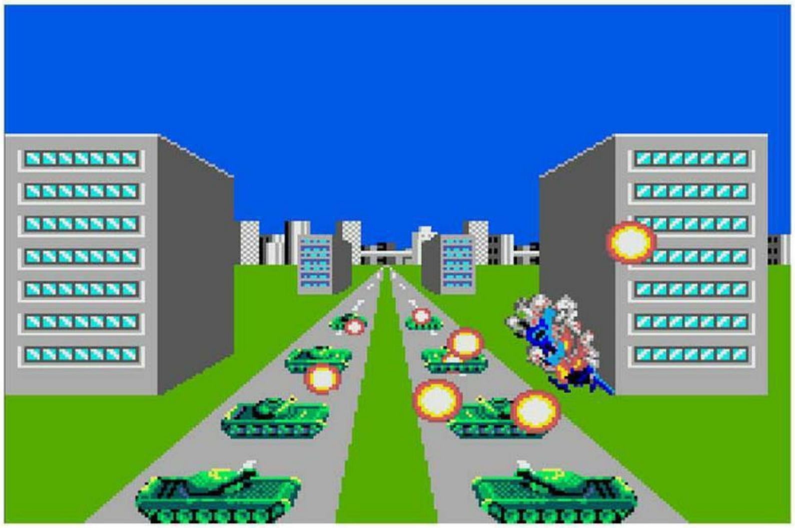
You are in control of a heavily armed chopper that must rid the city of enemy troops. Why the military thought that a single chopper was all that was needed to defeat an enemy with hundreds of choppers, tanks, and jet aircraft is beyond me, but hey, it does make for a challenging game.

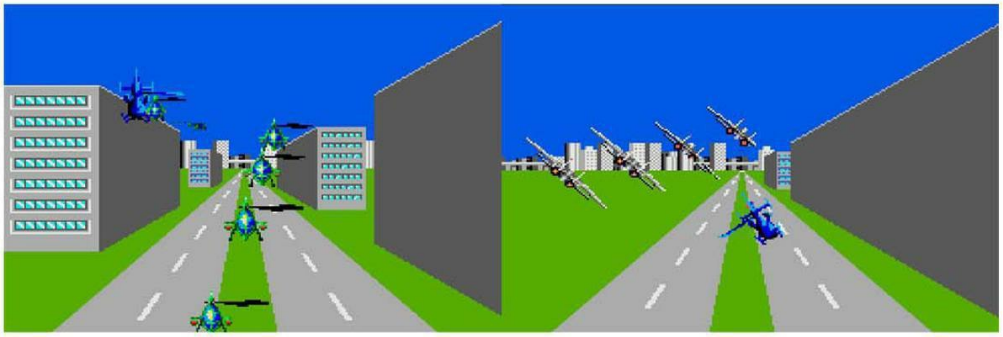
The levels are broken up into two segments, a more traditional top down shmup, and an After Burner style third person perspective. Both of these segments are controller throwing worthy given the difficultly, but the third person perspective sections are by far the worst of the two. Thankfully both sections are relatively short, so you don't have to survive for too long in order to move on.



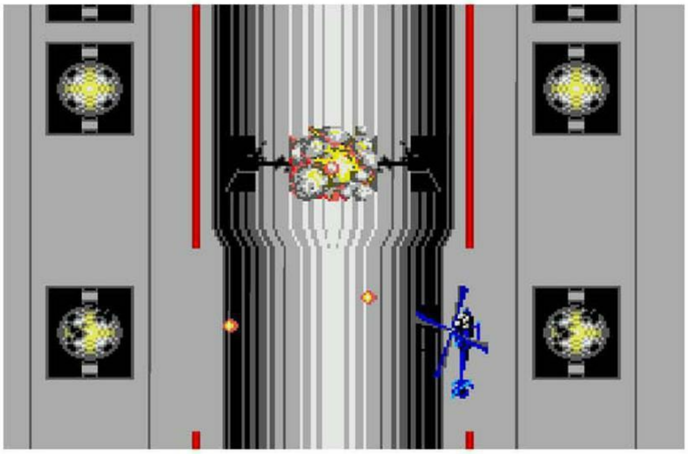






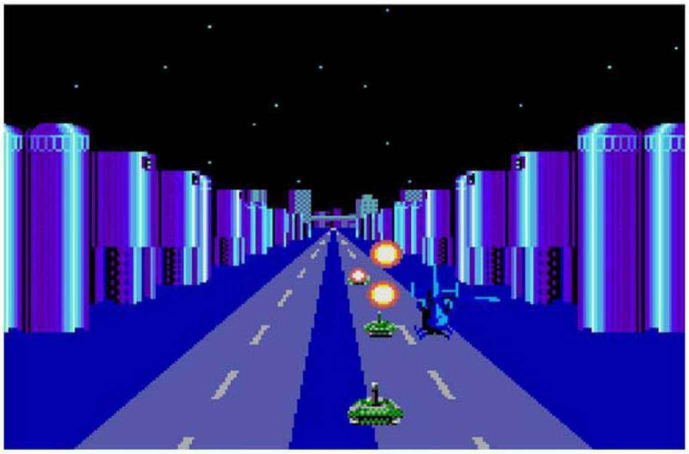


The top down section of the level is problematic in a number of ways. For starters your chopper is incredibly slow, bulky, and in all probability a bullet magnet. There are two types of enemies you'll encounter, flying and ground based troops. To combat these threats you have two types of shots, an air to air machine gun, and an air to ground missile. Neither of them feature an auto or rapid fire, and it is virtually impossible to fire them both at the same time. This wouldn't be a big deal if it weren't for the fact that enemy choppers fly at you by the dozens in kamikaze formation while several tanks unload on you as if they had a machine gun firing rockets at you. Of course that pales in comparison to the times when the game simply decides that it's time for you to die and throws out a chopper that fills the screen with so many tightly packed bullets that it is completely impossible to dodge them. Seriously, unless you get lucky and are lined up perfectly with this enemy bird as soon as it appears on screen you are going to watch helplessly as your powerful war machine is reduced to a pile of burning wreckage.



If you somehow survive that onslaught you are rewarded with a new perspective, and a quick and timely death. In theory this section should be easier to navigate since you have more room to work with and can see the oncoming fire better, but then again that's just in theory. In reality the tanks fire bullets that take up what seem like half the screen, fire them at a comically high rate, and oh yeah, they are heat seeking. That would be bad enough on its own, but then there are kamikaze choppers flying in a wall formation. Forget seeing the end of the level, if you last more than fifteen seconds consider yourself lucky.

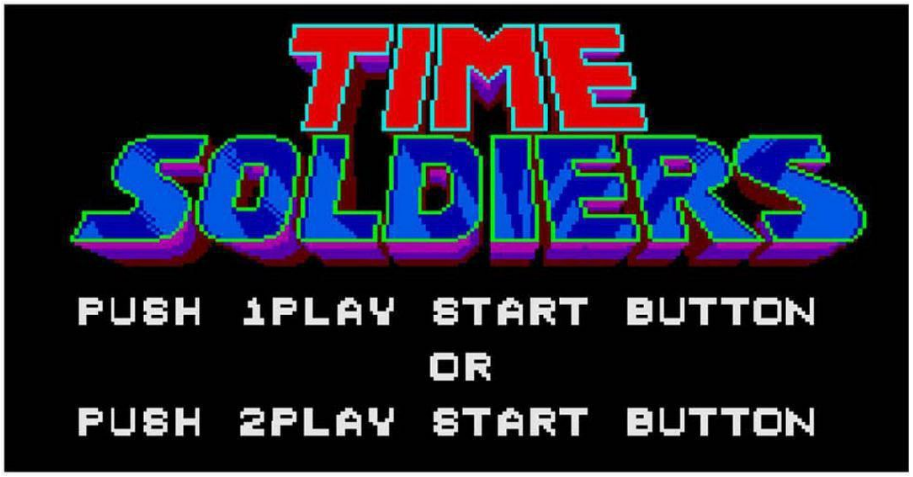
On the plus side the graphics and the music are quite good for the Master System. If you are a fan of the genre and can get past the insane difficult level then you'll probably enjoy the game. If you are looking for a casual way to single handedly decimate an entire opposing army, you should look elsewhere.



TIME SOLDIERS

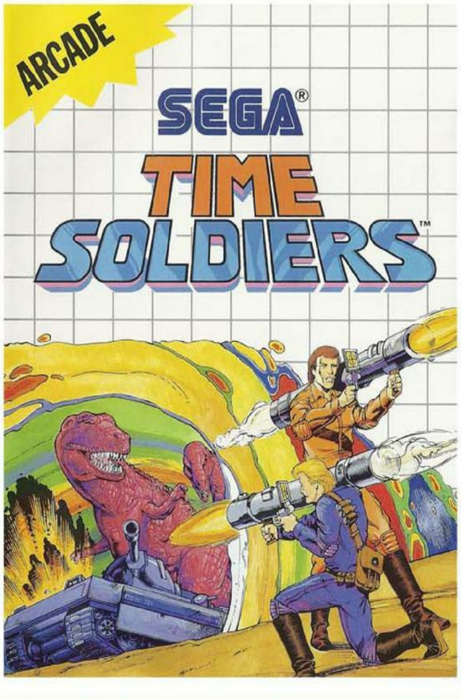
Release Date: 1988
Developer: Alpha Denshi
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Arcade
Players: 1 - 2


TIME
SOLDIERS

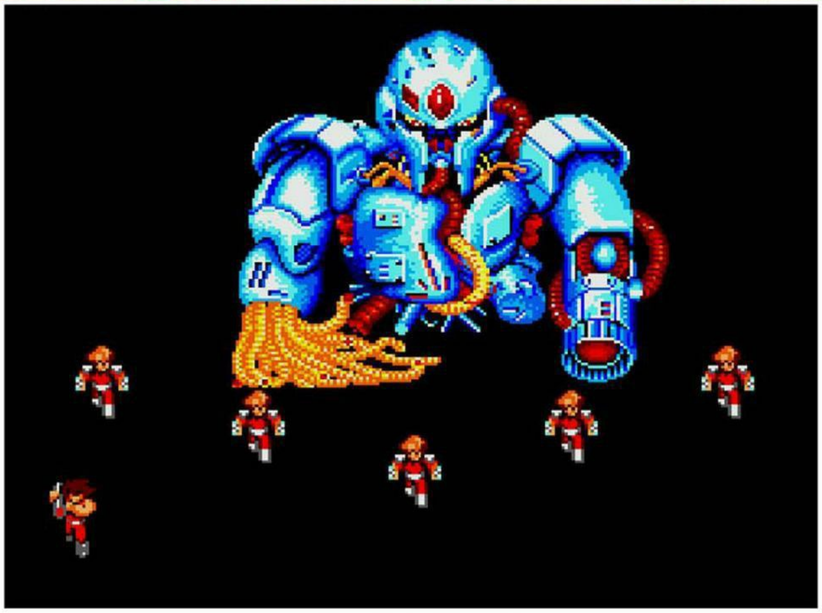
PUSH 1PLAY START BUTTON
OR
PUSH 2PLAY START BUTTON

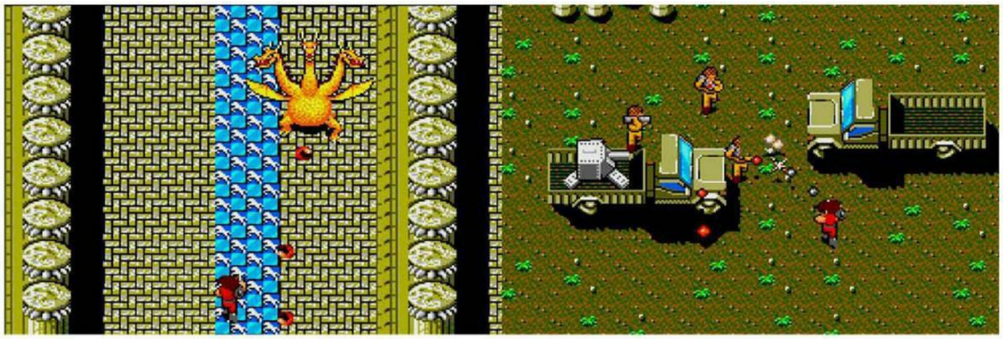
This is an admirable port of the arcade game.


ARCADE
SEGA
TIME
SOLDIERS

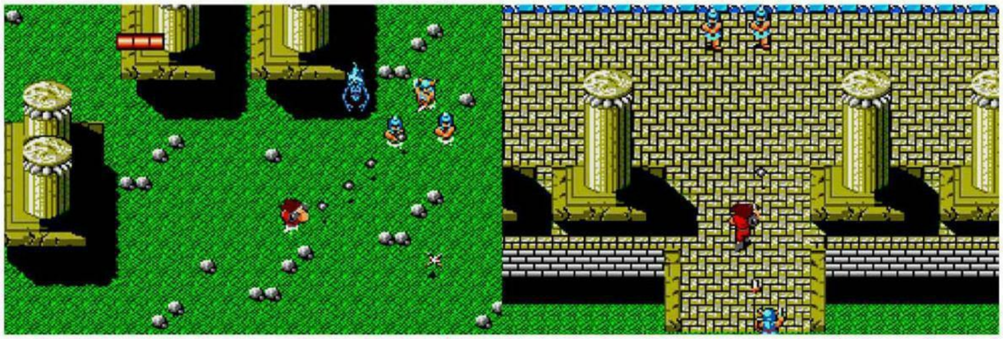
The basic premise is that you are a futuristic warrior that must venture through time in order to save your comrades in arms who have been kidnapped and hidden in various time periods. Even though the battlefields can be anywhere from ancient Rome to World War 2, your warrior is going to have a tough go of it mainly because he dies anytime someone so much as brushes up against him.

Now, this wouldn't be a major issue if he could actually shoot straight. It appears as though he is overly confident that because he is from the future and has all sorts of futuristic weaponry that he doesn't need to actually aim and that he'll be just fine if he shoots from the hip. As a result he can be standing eye to eye with an enemy soldier yet will somehow find a way to shoot just over their right shoulder, giving the enemy an opportunity to bump into the "invincible" time warrior and cause his death.

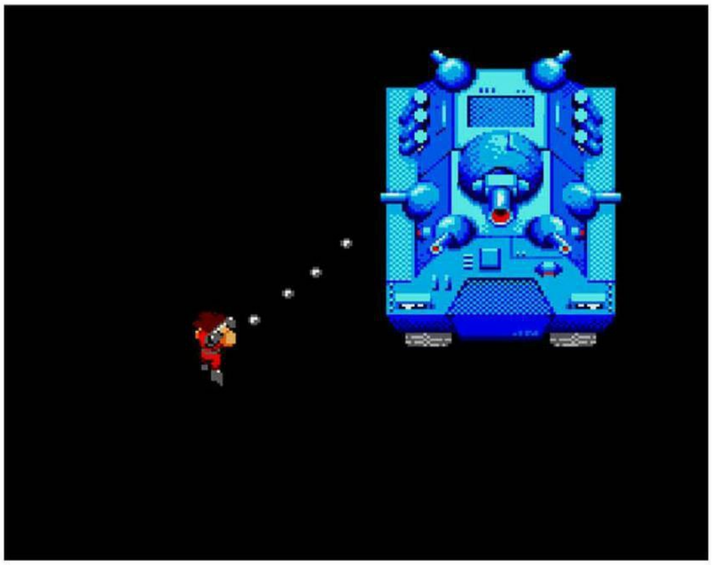




The other issue with the game really isn't the fault of the designers, rather it is due to the limitations of the Master System controller. The arcade version featured an Ikari Warriors style rotating controller, where you could be walking in one direction and firing in a different one. Here you have to be walking towards your enemy in order to take a shot at them, which makes life incredibly difficult since they didn't adjust the core design. It's not a game killer, but it can get somewhat frustrating, especially when combined with the fact your warrior couldn't hit the broad side of a barn with a cannon.



Other than the hero being an incredibly poor shot, everything else about the game is quite solid. The graphics, music, and concept are solid. There are plenty of different enemies within each time period to take on, and outside of the occasional odd boss (I don't remember there being a giant goat headed mace wielding creature in World War II) they are pretty much time period specific. Add in two player simultaneous support and the fact that the game is somewhat nonlinear (you start in a random time period and have to jump around to find who you are looking for) and you have yourself one of the better games on the Master System.



TRANSBOT

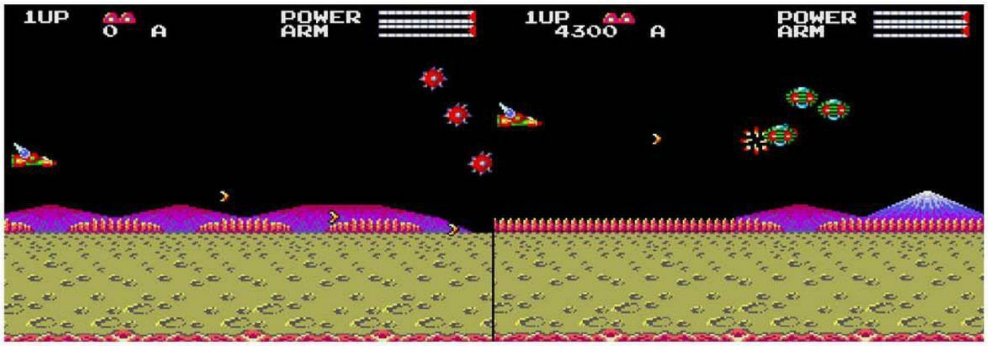
Release Date: 1986
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

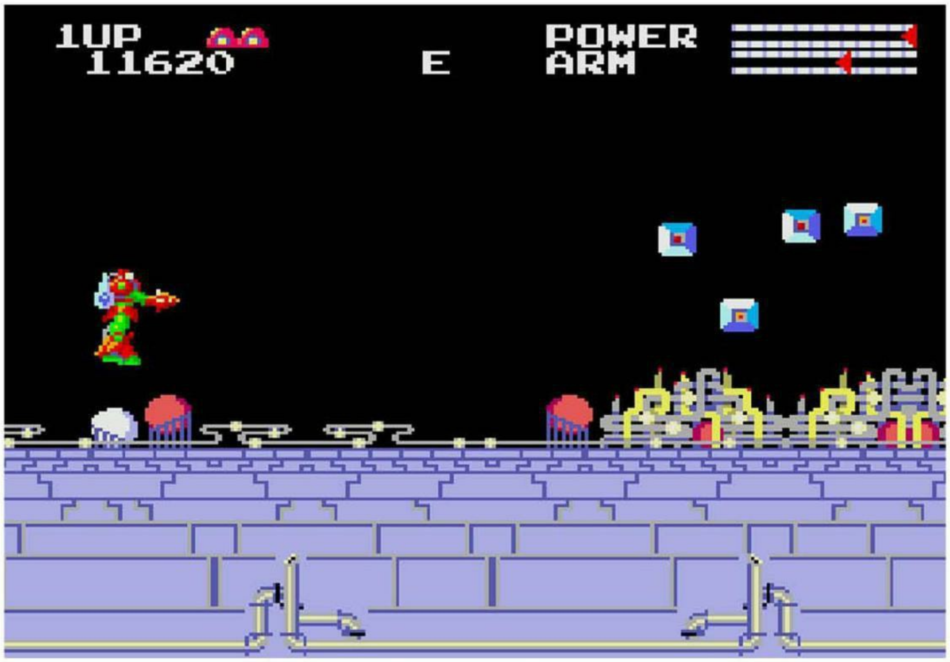
Genre: Shmup
Players: 1 - 2

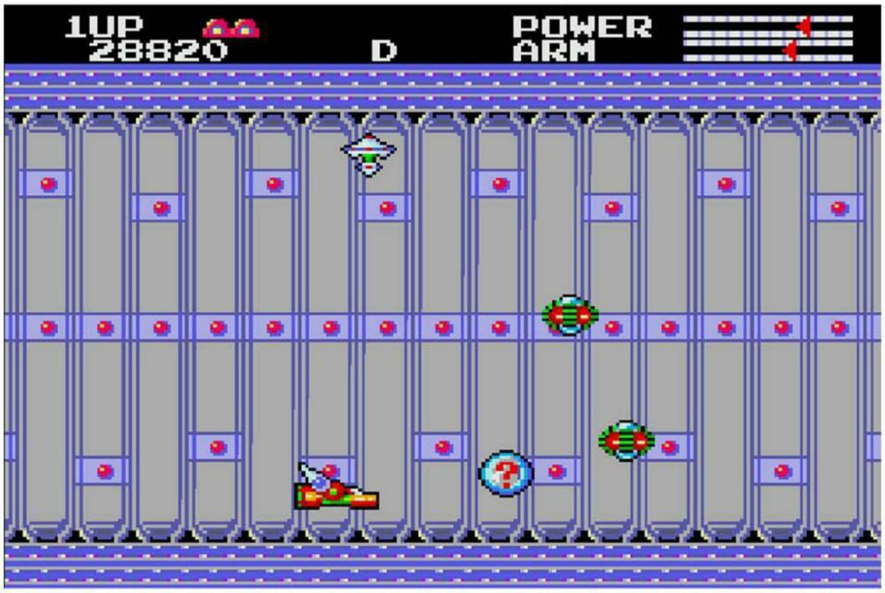
This is one of the earliest Master System releases and it really shows in the gameplay.

TransBot™
The Sega Card™
TransBot™
SEGA
SEGA®

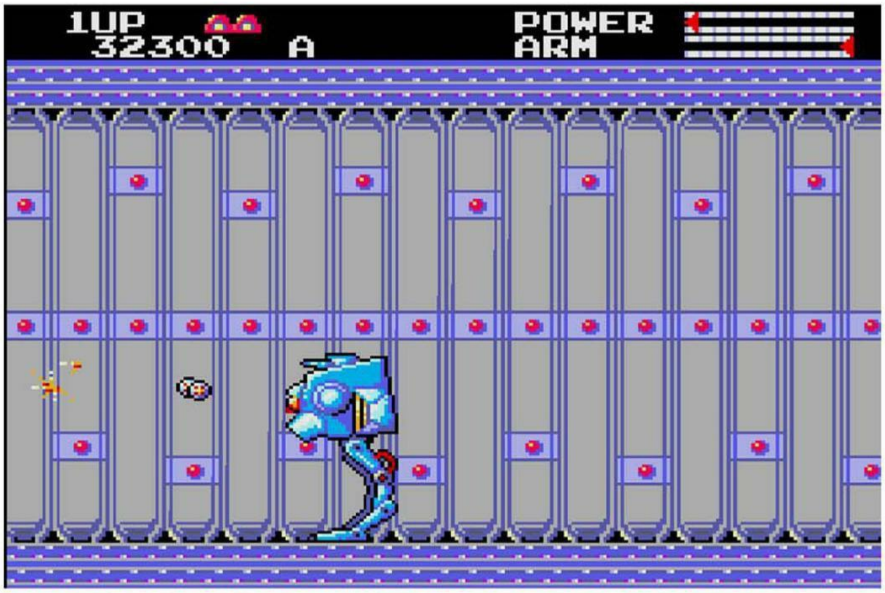
Sure the graphics and music are rudimentary 8-Bit, but the fact that there are no continues and that there is really no point to the game other than getting a high score really shows that this is early 8-Bit. Being released so early into the lifespan of a new medium meant that designers were still in the old mindset of creating games that existed for no other reason than to extract quarters from kids, and as a result there were games like Transbot that emulated that arcade mindset. This isn't a bad thing mind you, but it does detract greatly from the replay value.





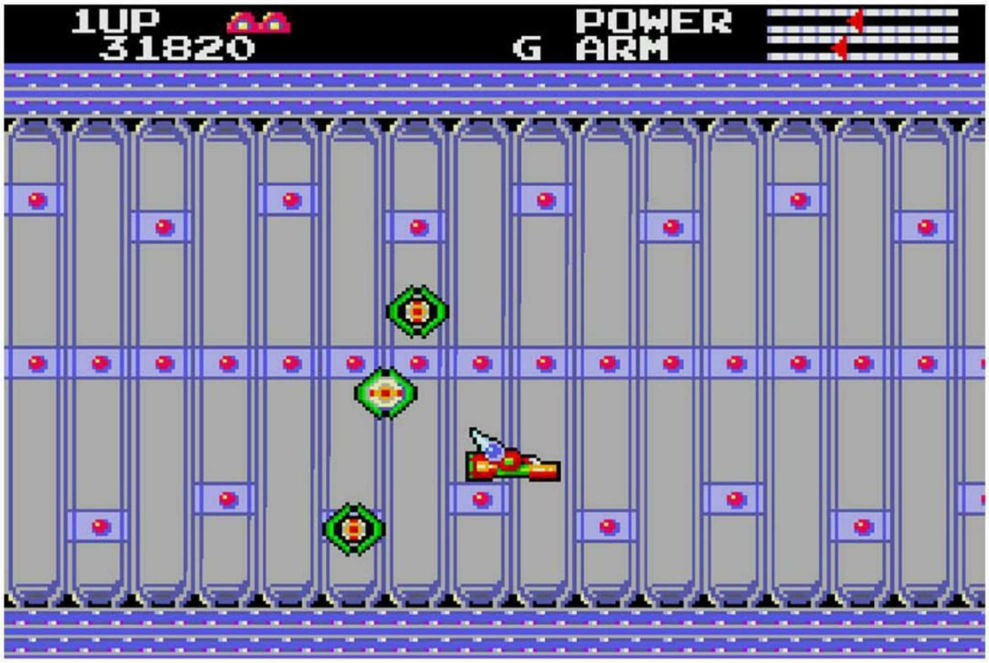


The premise is simple, you are a heavily armed ship and you have to shoot as many things out of the sky as possible. Instead of enemy ships however you get to fire at all varieties of circles and squares (seriously). If you survive long enough you'll get to face off against a much more interesting boss, such as one of the AT-AT Scout Walkers from Return of the Jedi. Apparently the pilot your ship is a member of the Rebel Alliance (or an Ewok).



Every now and then a transport truck will appear at the bottom of the screen that when shot will release a random powerup. These can range from faster shots to missiles that go right through multiple enemies to one that transforms you from a ship into a robot. Some of the power up weapons are quite useful, like a missile that rips through everything on screen or something that resembles a laser wall of death that flies across the screen. Sadly though most of the power ups are utterly useless, like being able to shoot a pea shooter in front and behind you at the same time. It's even worse when you are stuck with that weapon as the transformed robot, since you are much slower and take up a larger area on the screen. The only saving grace is that you have a limited number of shots, so if you get stuck with a bad weapon you can run through the rounds quite quickly.

If you enjoy the genre and want to experience a solid first generation 8-Bit game, then by all means give it a shot, you won't be disappointed.

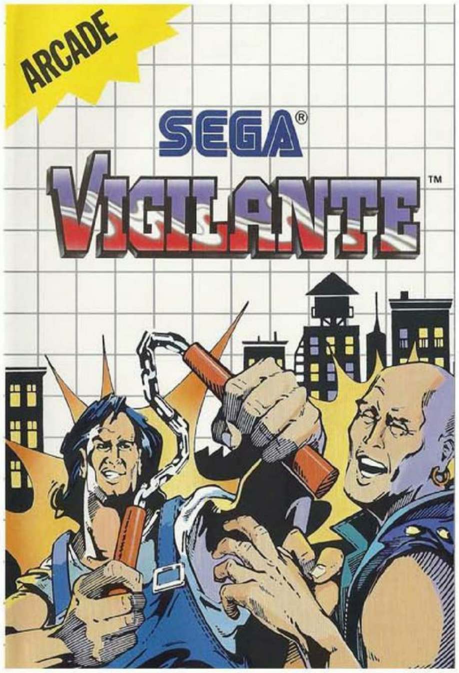


VIGILANTE

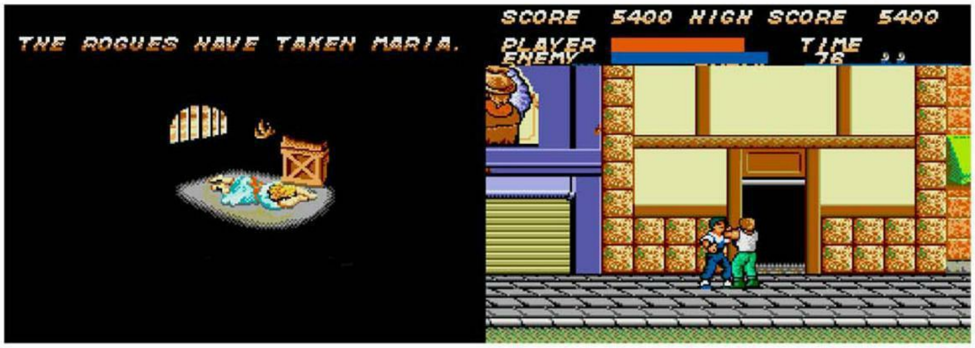
Release Date: 19881
Developer: Irem
Publisher: Sega

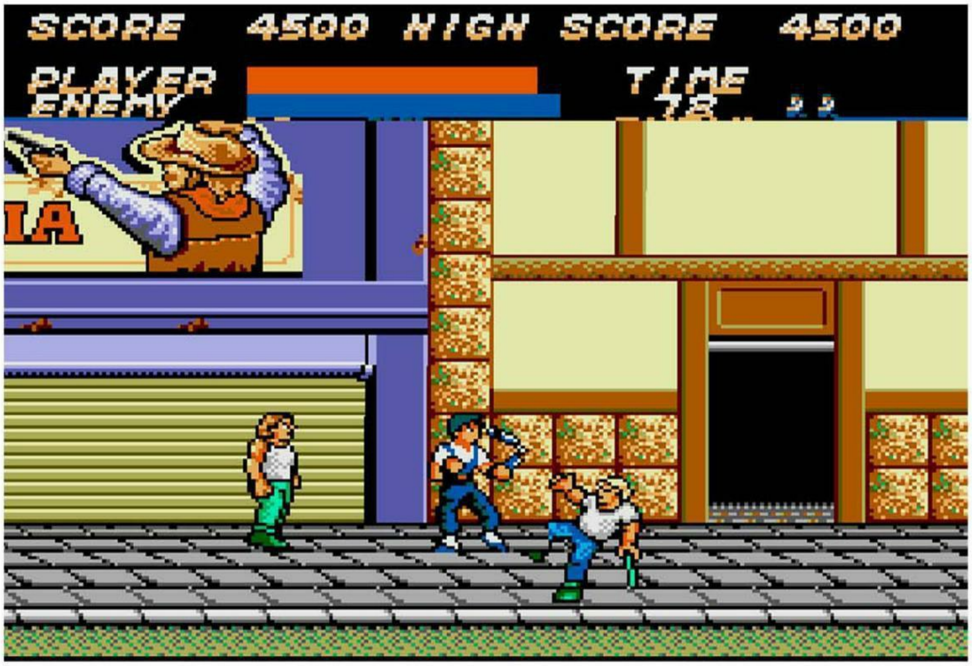
Genre: Action - Beat 'Em Up
Players: 1

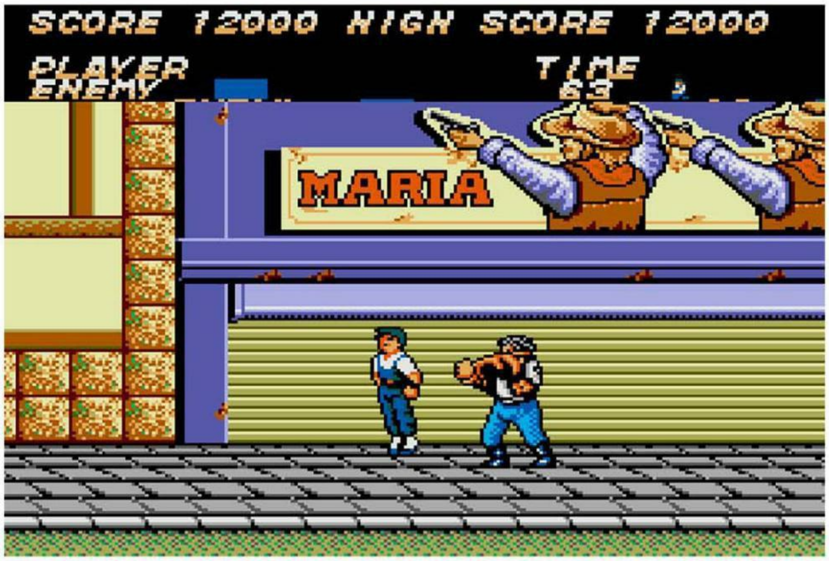
This port of the arcade game plays a lot like the Nintendo classic Kung Fu. Well, it plays a lot like it if you take out good controls, good collision detection, and any semblance of fun.


ARCADE
SEGA®
VIGILANTE™

The story is the generic late 80's/early 90's "they kidnapped your girlfriend so you have to beat up everybody in a twenty block radius to get her back" storyline. The gameplay is just as generic as you walk from left to right punching, kicking, and occasionally nunchucking your way though endless waves of generic enemies. The enemies are rather friendly though considering that instead of punching or kicking, they attack through hugging. Well, most of them do, every now and then you'll come across one that has no problem shooting you in the face repeatedly.


THE ROGUES HAVE TAKEN MARIA.
SCORE 5400 HIGH SCORE 5400
PLAYER
ENEMY
TIME
76


SCORE 4500 HIGH SCORE 4500
PLAYER
ENEMY
TIME
78
IA


SCORE 12000 HIGH SCORE 12000
PLAYER
ENEMY
TIME
63
MARIA

SCORE 11100 HIGH SCORE 11100
PLAYER
ENEMY
TIME
51
MARIA

SCORE 10800 HIGH SCORE 10800
PLAYER
ENEMY
TIME
56
MARIA

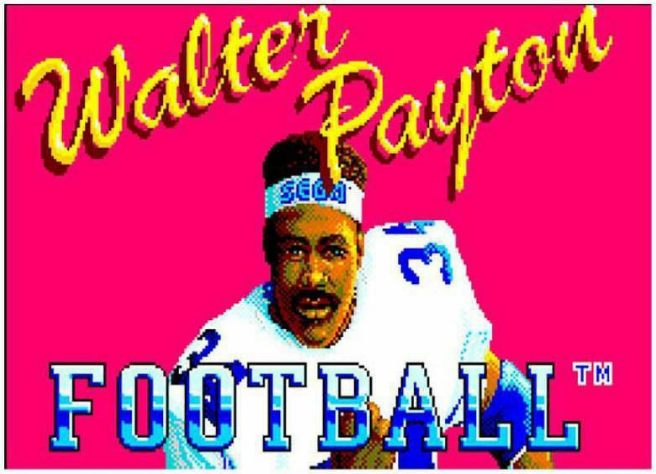
Of course none of the enemy attacks come close to the power of the first boss, who apparently has mastered the art of telekineses. Sure he can punch and kick you, but every now and then you'll freeze and begin to float in the air where he proceeds to punch you repeatedly. I assume they were trying to have him grab you while pummeling you, but given that you can be three steps away from him when he starts this move I'm going to go with he has telekineses. Add in the fact that the collision detection is completely non-existent with him (seriously, you can kick him in the fact with your foot going all the way through to the back of his head and it won't register a hit) and it's going to take a miracle for you to see level two.

This is really one of the worst games on the system and should really be avoided at all costs.

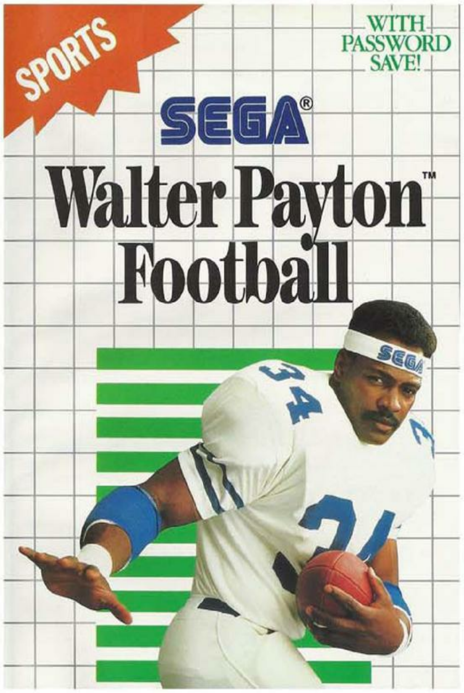
WALTER PAYTON FOOTBALL

Release Date: 1989
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Sports - Football
Players: 1 - 2

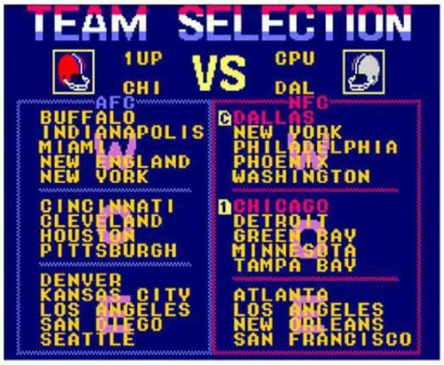

Walter Payton
SEGA
FOOTBALL™

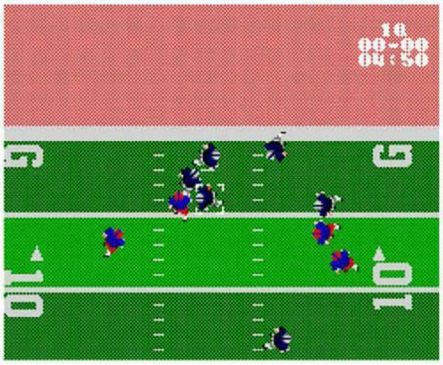
This is arguable the best football game on the Master System.

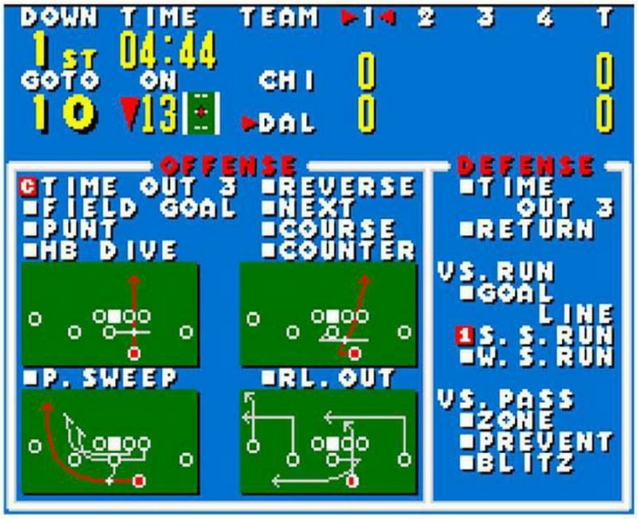

SPORTS
WITH PASSWORD SAVE!
SEGA®
Walter Payton™
Football
SEGA
34

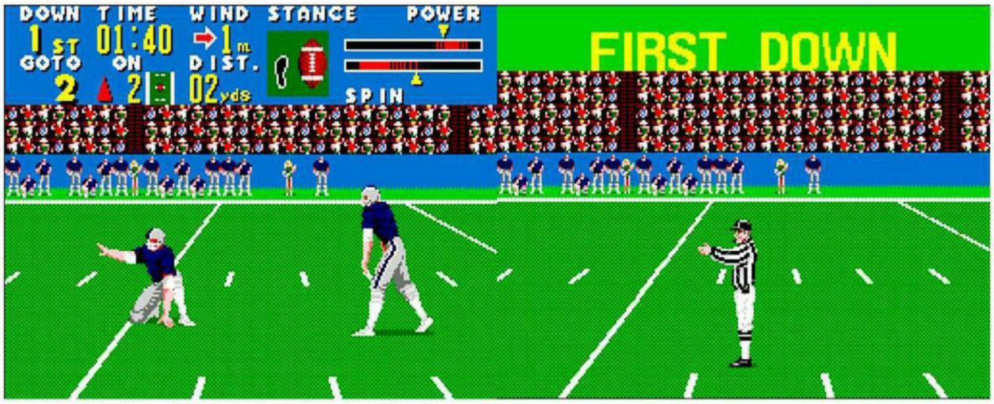
Played from the top down perspective, you get to run/pass/kick your way to victory during either a Monday Night Football contest or in a 10 team playoff. While it does lack a full season, there is more than enough football goodness to keep you busy.

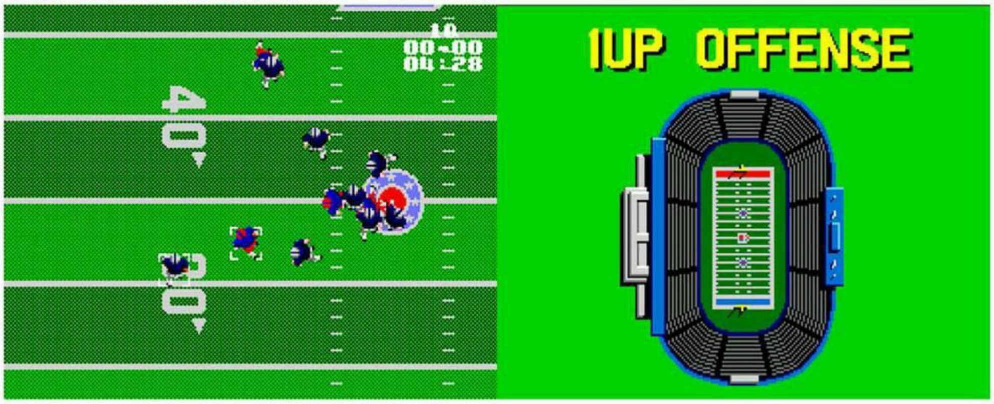
Once you pick your real NFL team you take to the field. On defense you'll find that you need an ultra quick reaction time in order to keep up with the computer since as soon as you pick a defensive setup the ball is hiked almost immediately. This does speed the game up, but it also puts you at a disadvantage since you have no time to see how the offense is set up. Not that it matters much anyway since you can't switch players before (or after) the snap. This means if you miss your tackle or are blocked you are going to have to rely on the computer to bail you out. That said, the difficulty level on defense is just right, with it being not too hard or easy to stop them. Bottom line is, the computer is going to make the game competitive.


TEAM SELECTION
1UP
CHI
VS
CPU
DAL
AFC
BUFFALO
INDIANAPOLIS
MIAMI
NEW ENGLAND
NEW YORK
CINCINNATI
CLEVELAND
HOUSTON
PITTSBURGH
DENVER
KANSAS CITY
LOS ANGELES
SAN DIEGO
SEATTLE
NFC
DALLAS
NEW YORK
PHILADELPHIA
PHOENIX
WASHINGTON
CHICAGO
DETROIT
GREEN BAY
MINNESOTA
TAMPA BAY
ATLANTA
LOS ANGELES
NEW ORLEANS
SAN FRANCISCO

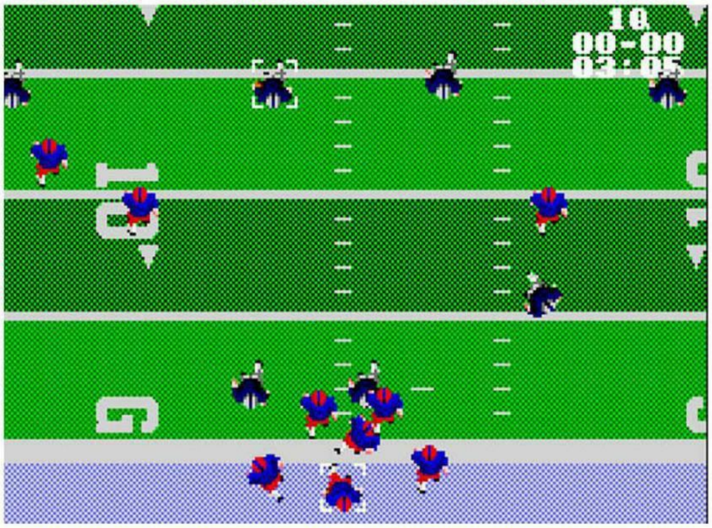

1Q
00-00
04:50
G
G
10
10


DOWN
TIME
TEAM
1
2
3
4
T
1ST
04:44
GOTO
ON
CHI
0
0
10
13
DAL
0
0
OFFENSE
TIME OUT 3
FIELD GOAL
PUNT
HB DIVE
REVERSE
NEXT
COURSE
COUNTER
P. SWEEP
RL. OUT
DEFENSE
TIME OUT 3
RETURN
VS. RUN
GOAL LINE
S. S. RUN
W. S. RUN
VS. PASS
ZONE
PREVENT
BLITZ



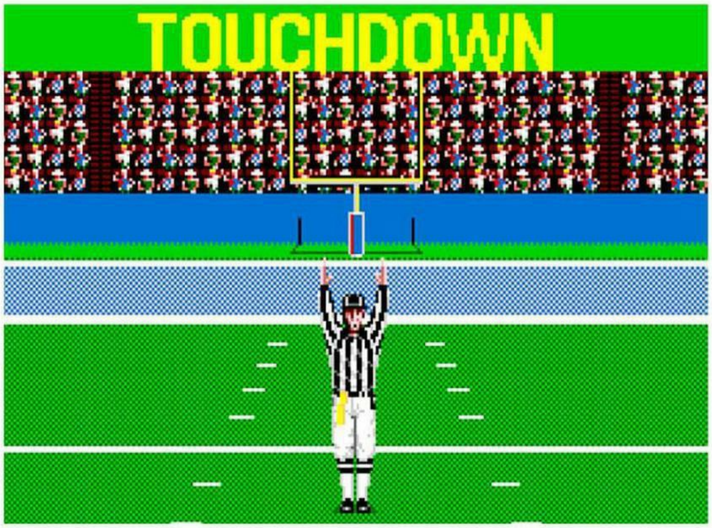


That is of course if you can master the offensive side of the ball, which is easier said than done. While you have some help on defense, on offense you are totally on your own, which is painfully evident when the computer kicks off to you and you stand helplessly by as the ball bounces around in the end zone since the kick off return man under your control didn't automatically go towards the kick. Once you find yourself pinned deep in your own territory your only real option is to run the ball since passing is very difficult thanks to the fact that you gain control of your receiver as soon as the ball is in the air. This works OK if you are running an out pattern, but not so much if you are running a post pattern since you have to hold up to throw the ball to that area of the field which will change the direction of your receiver if you aren't lightening quick on the controller. The offense isn't impossible to master, but it does have a steep learning curve.



As for play calling there are multiple pages of offensive plays, as a selection of generic defensive setups. The defensive selections are designed against specific types of plays, like deep pass or strong side rush. These don't really make much of an impact however and are really just there to give the defensive player something to do while the offense is picking a play. The offensive plays include a variety of runs and passes, and also gives you the options to reverse them, which is nice if you happen to be stuck on one side of the field.

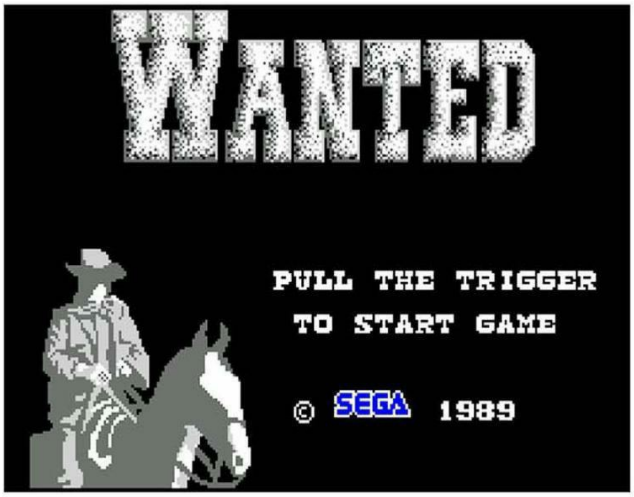
Offensive learning curve aside, this is one of the best sports game on the Master System. If you like football you should track it down.



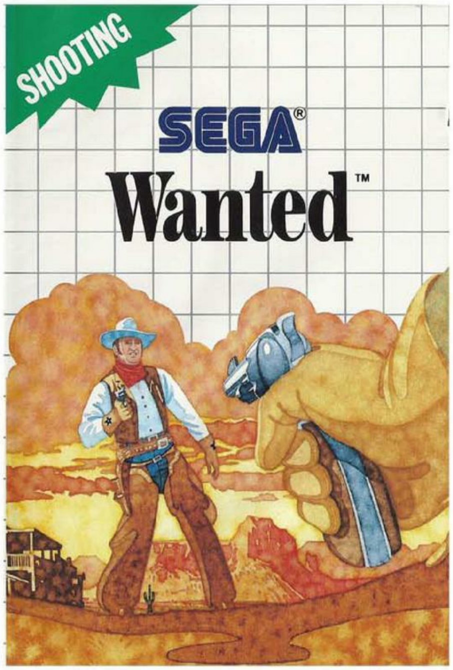
WANTED

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Light Gun Shooter
Players: 1

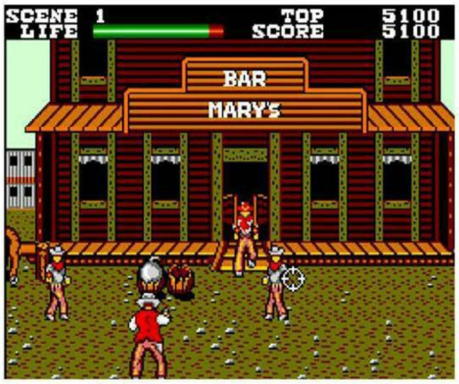

WANTED
PULL THE TRIGGER
TO START GAME
© SEGA 1989

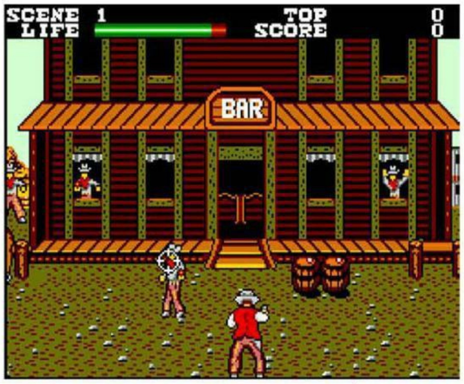
Wanted is one of the best light gun shooters on the Master System.

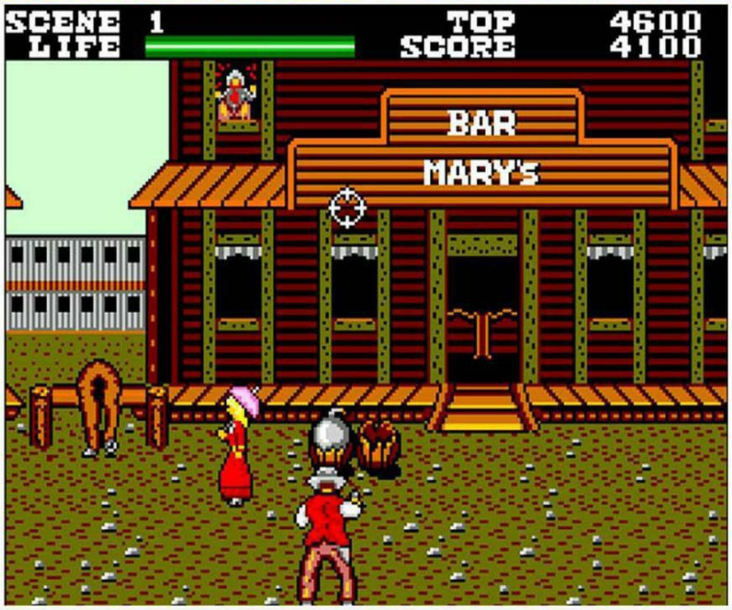

SHOOTING
SEGA®
Wanted™

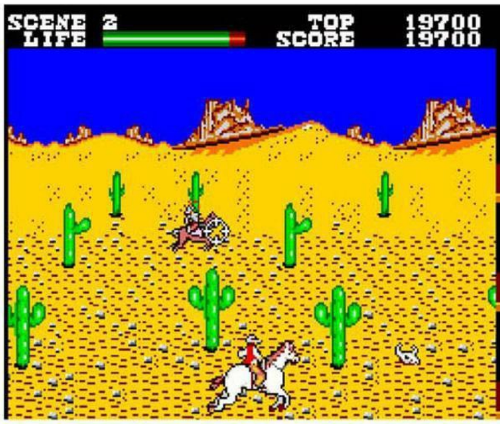
The basic premise is simple, you are a cowboy who must clean up a crime ridden town using the only thing criminal of the era understood, hot lead. And there are plenty of criminals that are in dire need of being brought to justice.

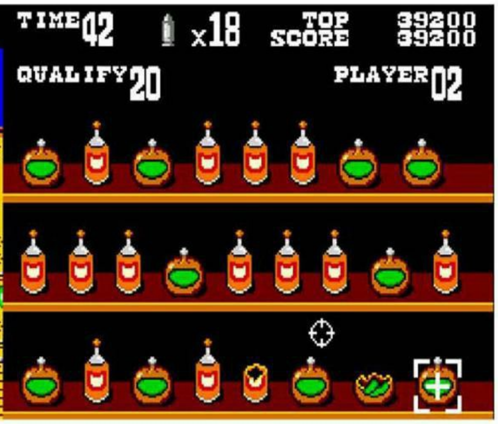
There are two types of levels, the towns and horseback. The town levels have you mowing through dozens of armed cowboys while having to take care not to shoot innocent bystanders. This is made more difficult by the fact that half of the bystanders (i.e. the ones that aren't women) look exactly like the cowboys who are trying to kill you. Some of them will throw their hands up in the hopes that you won't gun them down, however some casually stroll right through the middle of a gun fight.


SCENE 1
LIFE
TOP 5100
SCORE 5100
BAR
MARY'S

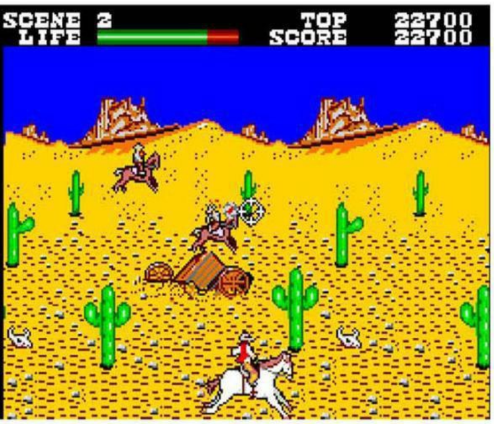

SCENE 1
LIFE
TOP 0
SCORE 0
BAR


SCENE 1
LIFE
TOP 4600
SCORE 4100
BAR
MARY'S


SCENE 2
LIFE
TOP SCORE
19700
19700

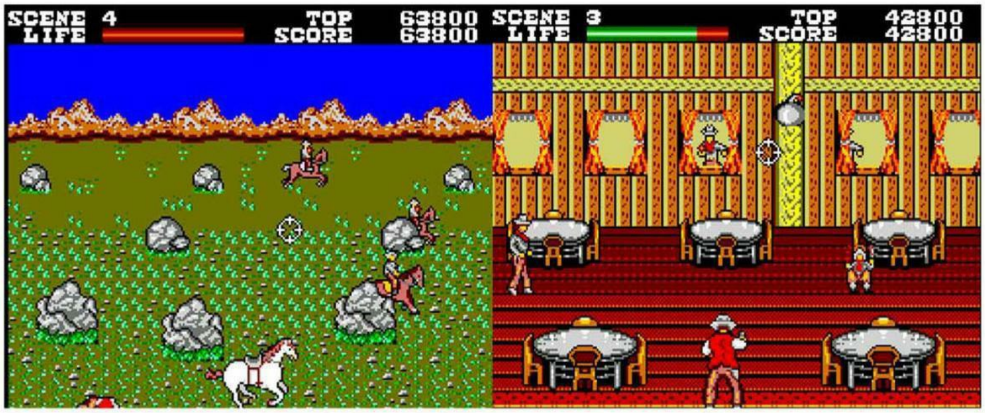

TIME 42
x18
TOP SCORE
39200
39200
QUALIFY 20
PLAYER 02

CHALLENGE SCENE


SCENE 2
LIFE
TOP SCORE
22700
22700

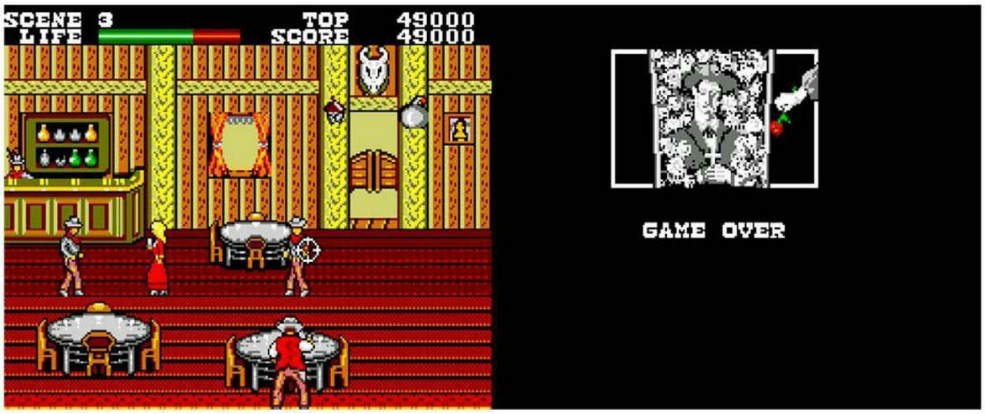
If you do mess up and shoot an innocent you will lose a portion of your health bar. You will be able to tell the bad guys apart from the innocent ones by the fact that they are pointing a gun in your direction. Thankfully they take a few moments before shooting which gives you an opportunity to react. Once you reach the end of the town level you'll face off against a much more powerful gunslinger that will require multiple shots to dispatch.

The horseback levels are a complete and total free for all, as there are only bad guys on horseback trying to kill you. They will ride by very quickly so if you want a chance at surviving just continually pull the trigger and hope for the best. Every now and then there will be a guy standing as you ride by, and if you catch him with a bullet he'll reveal the lone power up, a giant bomb that will clear the screen of enemies. The bomb is also present during the town stages.


SCENE 4
LIFE
TOP 63800
SCORE 63800
SCENE 3
LIFE
TOP 42800
SCORE 42800

There is a challenge stage that will put you in a room with a bunch of liquor bottles and you will be prompted to shoot specific ones. You'll have to be quick through as the target is only on screen for a split second. You will have a limited number of bullets as well as a target number of successful shots to achieve.

There is a bit of a genre oddity here in that your character is visible onscreen as he walks through the level. While it's nice to have a visual representation of yourself on screen, it takes you out of being a cowboy and puts you firmly in the role of a guardian angel. Well, a heavily armed guardian angel.

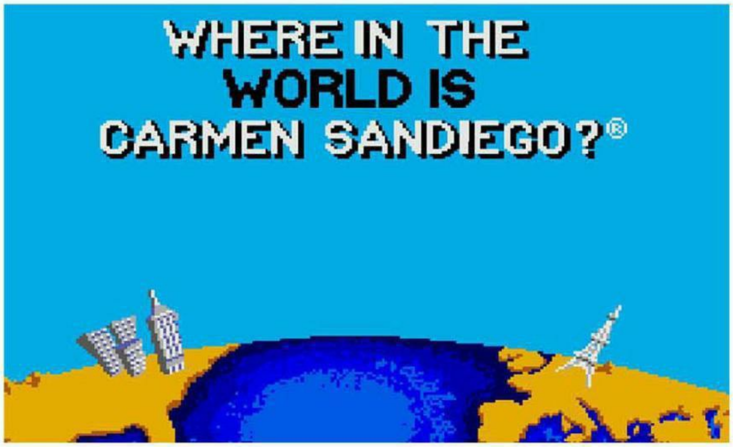

SCENE 3
LIFE
TOP 49000
SCORE 49000
GAME OVER

WANTED

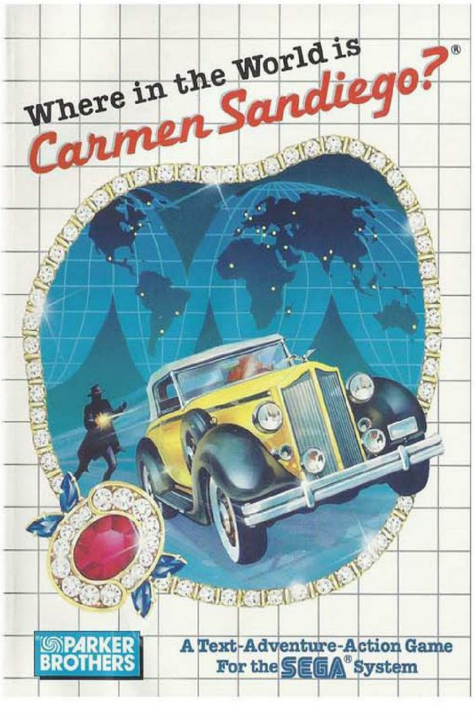
WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CARMEN SANDIEGO?

Release Date: 1989
Developer: Parker Brothers
Publisher: Parker Brothers

Genre: Puzzle/Edutainment
Players: 1

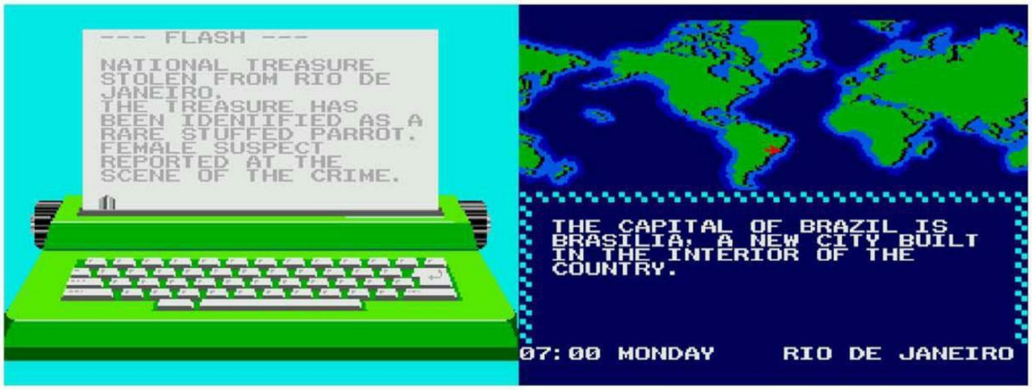

WHERE IN THE
WORLD IS
CARMEN SANDIEGO?®

This is one of the few true edutainment games to grace the 8-Bit era.


Where in the World is
Carmen Sandiego?®
PARKER BROTHERS
A Text-Adventure-Action Game
For the SEGA® System

Pretty much the only two places most kids would ever play this game would be at school, or if their mother set up a play date with the weird neighborhood kid whose parents thought everything they bought for their precious little son had to be educational so that he could be smart enough to get into an Ivy League school to make the family proud.

This game is based on the PBS game show of the same name, and is very similar in content. After selecting your difficulty, you are given an assignment. One of Carmen's gang has stolen some valuable treasure, and it is your job to track them down. You do this by jet setting across the world, interrogating people who might have noticed something about the thief, such as hair color or what kind of flag they had on their car.

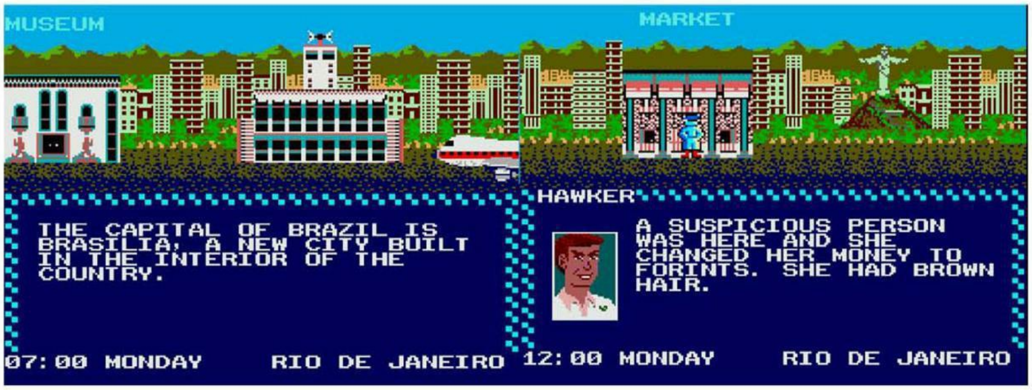


--- FLASH ---

NATIONAL TREASURE STOLEN FROM RIO DE JANEIRO.
THE TREASURE HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS A RARE STUFFED PARROT.
FEMALE SUSPECT REPORTED AT THE SCENE OF THE CRIME.

THE CAPITAL OF BRAZIL IS BRASILIA, A NEW CITY BUILT IN THE INTERIOR OF THE COUNTRY.

07:00 MONDAY RIO DE JANEIRO

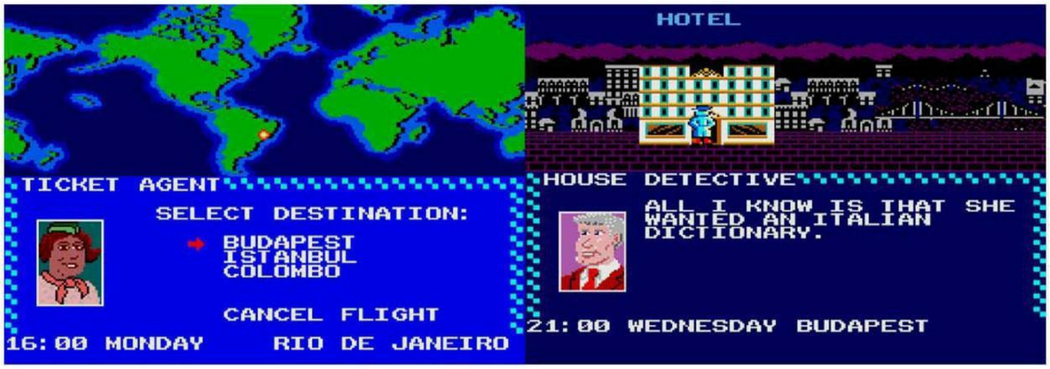


THE CAPITAL OF BRAZIL IS BRASILIA, A NEW CITY BUILT IN THE INTERIOR OF THE COUNTRY.

07:00 MONDAY RIO DE JANEIRO

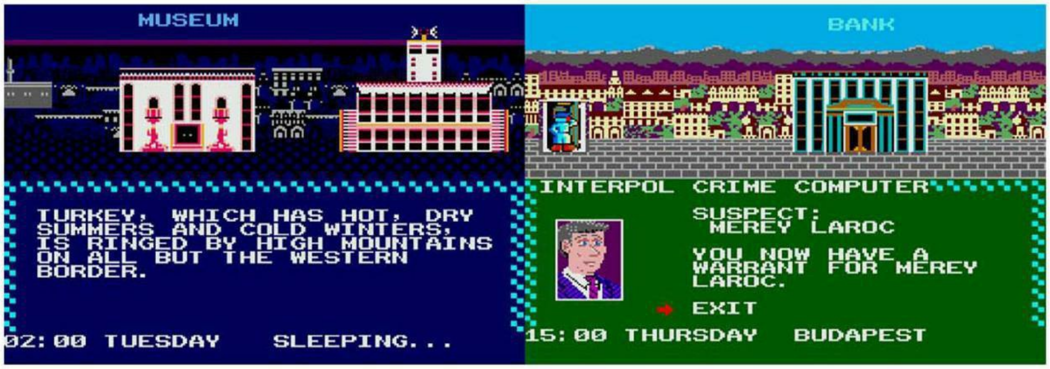
A SUSPICIOUS PERSON WAS HERE AND SHE CHANGED HER MONEY TO FORINTS. SHE HAD BROWN HAIR.

12:00 MONDAY RIO DE JANEIRO


TICKET AGENT
SELECT DESTINATION:
BUDAPEST
ISTANBUL
COLOMBO
CANCEL FLIGHT
16:00 MONDAY RIO DE JANEIRO
HOTEL
HOUSE DETECTIVE

ALL I KNOW IS THAT SHE WANTED AN ITALIAN DICTIONARY.

21:00 WEDNESDAY BUDAPEST


MUSEUM

TURKEY, WHICH HAS HOT, DRY SUMMERS AND COLD WINTERS, IS RINGED BY HIGH MOUNTAINS ON ALL BUT THE WESTERN BORDER.

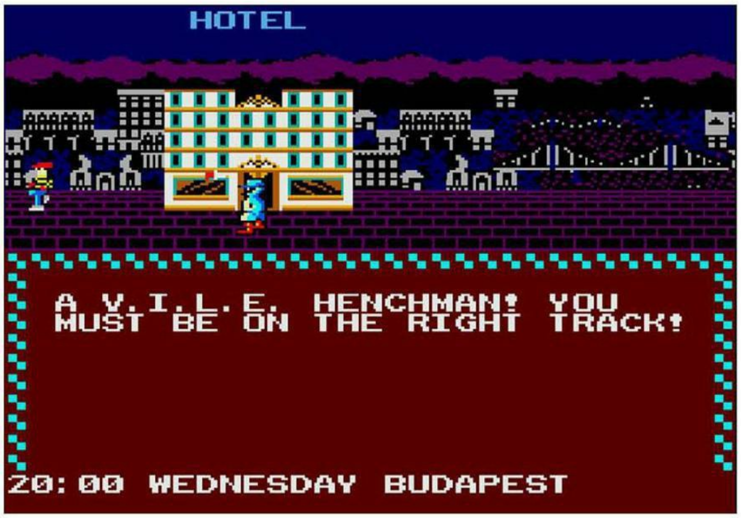
02:00 TUESDAY SLEEPING...
BANK
INTERPOL CRIME COMPUTER

SUSPECT:
MEREY LAROC

YOU NOW HAVE A WARRANT FOR MEREY LAROC.

EXIT
15:00 THURSDAY BUDAPEST

After gathering info it's off to the worst airport system the world has ever seen to decide what country to visit next in the hopes of staying hot on the trail. So why is it the worst airport system you ask? Well, if you make a mistake and fly to the wrong country, you have to fly back to the original country in order to pick up a connector. Nothing like flying halfway around the world, only to have to fly back just so you can fly halfway around the world again to get to a city you could have driven to. On the one hand it's understandable since the game wants to keep you on the correct path and punish you for making a wrong choice, but it's frustrating nonetheless.

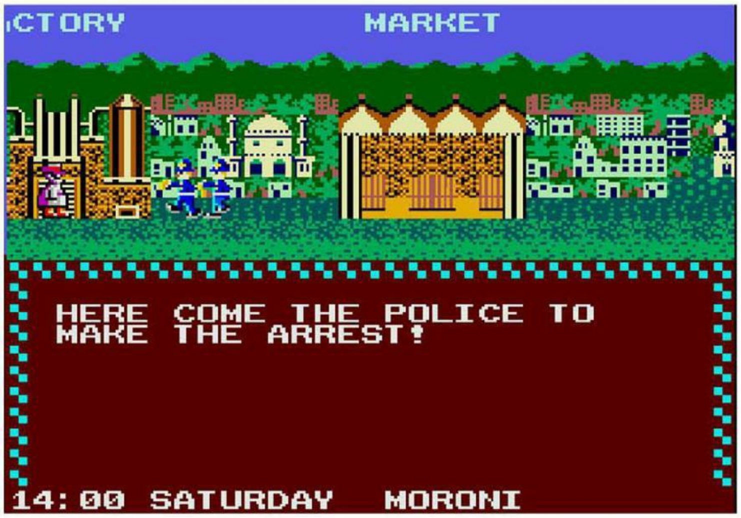


A V.I.L.E. HENCHMAN! YOU MUST BE ON THE RIGHT TRACK!

20:00 WEDNESDAY BUDAPEST

If you find yourself on the right trail one of Carmen's henchmen will randomly appear and chuck a knife at your face. These are easy enough to dodge, but if you aren't paying attention it will take a couple hours of your precious time to recover. Speaking of recovery, expect to do a lot of it since your super detective can't function on any less than eight hours sleep (and apparently can't sleep on flights either). This soaks up a great deal of your time and can even cost you the game if you get sleepy while trying to apprehend the criminal.

All in all, for an Edutainment game it is pretty decent. There are plenty of cases to undertake, and who knows, you just might learn some obscure geography in the process!



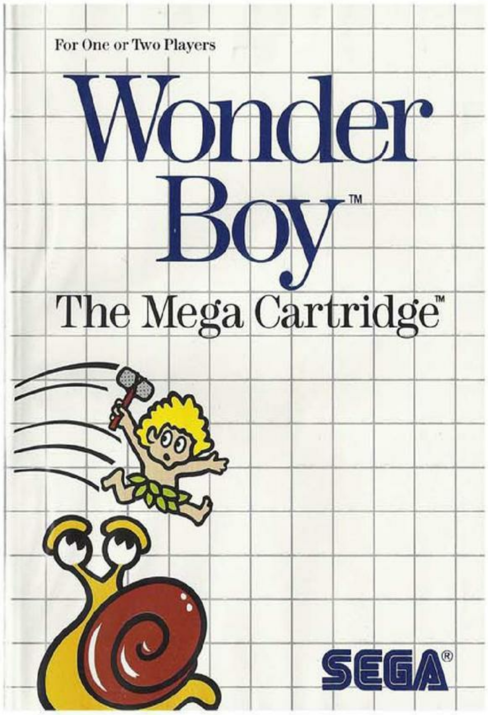
HERE COME THE POLICE TO MAKE THE ARREST!

14:00 SATURDAY MORONI

WONDER BOY

Release Date: 1987
Developer: West One
Publisher: Sega

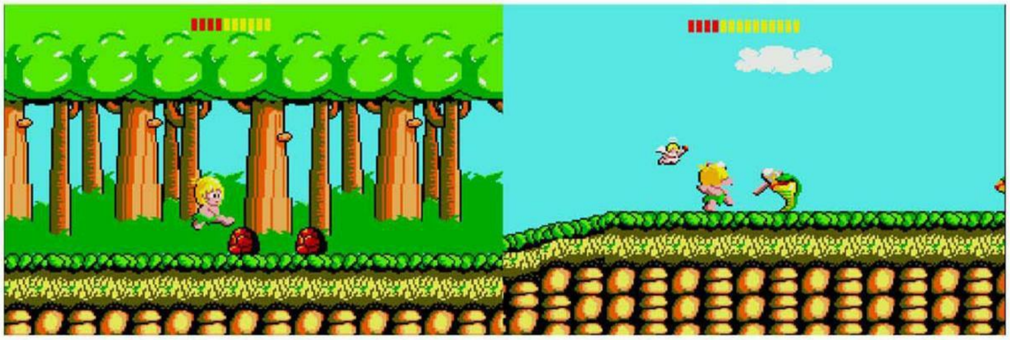
Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1

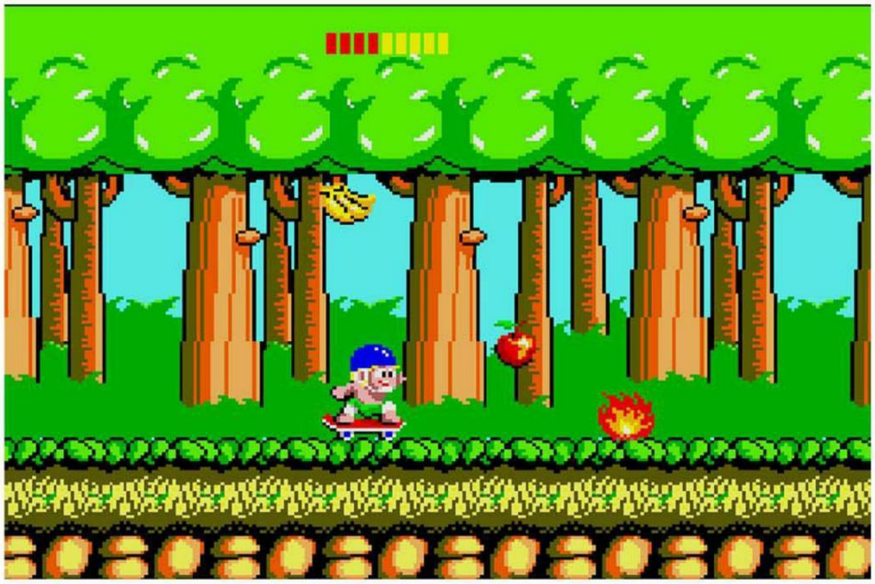

For One or Two Players
Wonder
Boy™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

This is the first appearance of Wonder Boy on the Master System, and it is really nothing more than a straightforward and simplistic action plat former.

The premise is the usual "make it from point A to point B while avoiding random enemies and bottom pits" variety, but it is way more difficult than it sounds.

When you begin you'll notice what looks like a typical health bar at the top of the screen, unlike most health bars however this one begins to deteriorate rapidly. Granted this is more of a timer than a health bar (especially since most things kill you in one hit), but there are some "enemies" that will drain this bar as well. I put enemies in quotations because, well, it's rocks. Inanimate rocks will drain your timer. Luckily they are stationary and easily avoided, which is something that can't be said about the rest of the enemies. The enemies are pretty standard, ranging from snails to fish to giant boulders. Frankly there is nothing special or unique about them in any way.

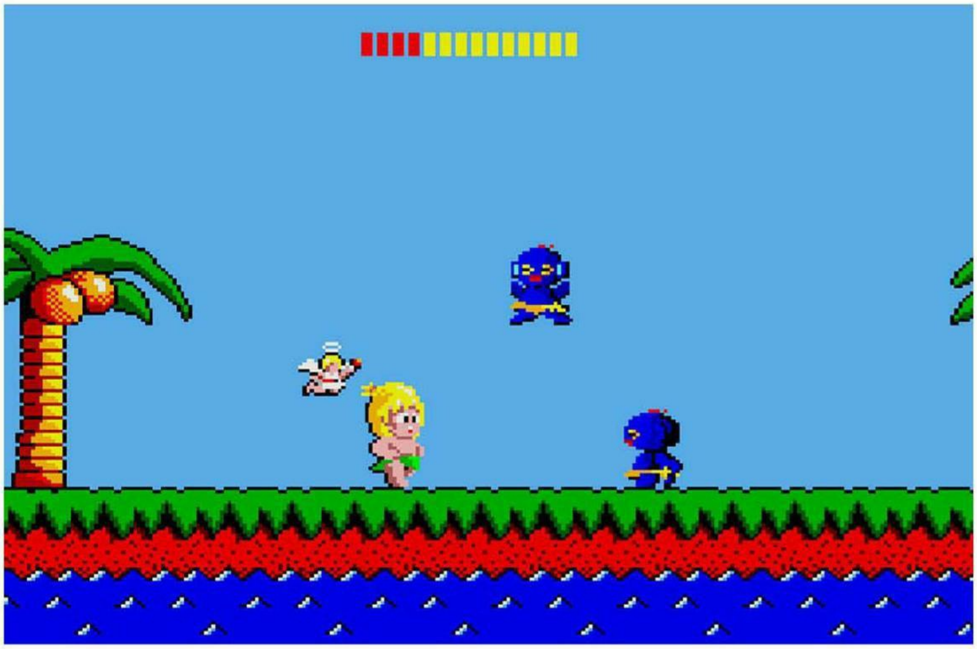




The bottomless pits however will devour you whole, mainly because the jumping controls aren't really that great. While it is easy to jump across a small gap, making it across the larger ones requires you to land on a platform that is floating over the chasm. This is made difficult thanks to the fact that it is too far away to make using your normal jump and too close to make using your super jump. You have to throw away all of your platforming experience that tells you to jump at the edge of the cliff and instead take a leap of faith a few steps back. To make matters worse, once you are in the air you are going to land wherever you are going to land since you don't really have any control over your airborne character.

Jumping aside, there are a few good things about the game. During each level there are plenty of checkpoints, so dying only takes you back a little ways. You have a couple of powerups in the form of a stone axe that you can chuck at your enemies, and a skateboard (complete with safety helmet) that will make your journey through the levels much faster and easier.

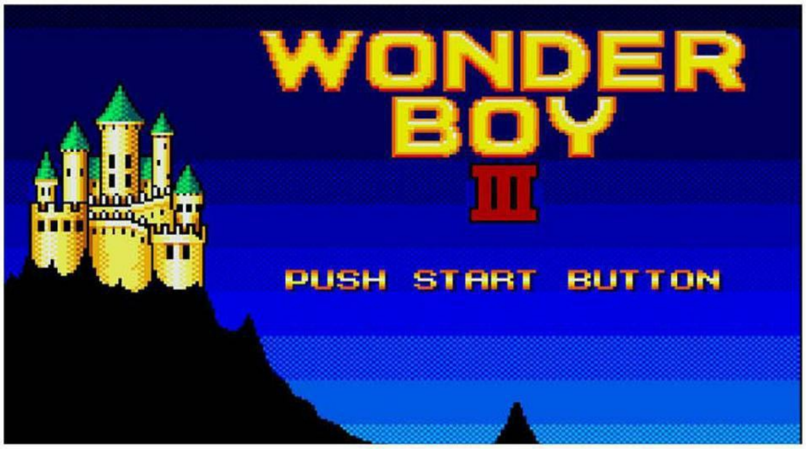
If you are a fan of the genre you should give this a shot. Now if you had a Nintendo growing up and wanted to play a Master System game, chances are you were out of luck, but in this case you would be OK since the game was repackaged and released as Adventure Island. Actually Adventure Island is the more complete version of the game since there is a bonus level added on.



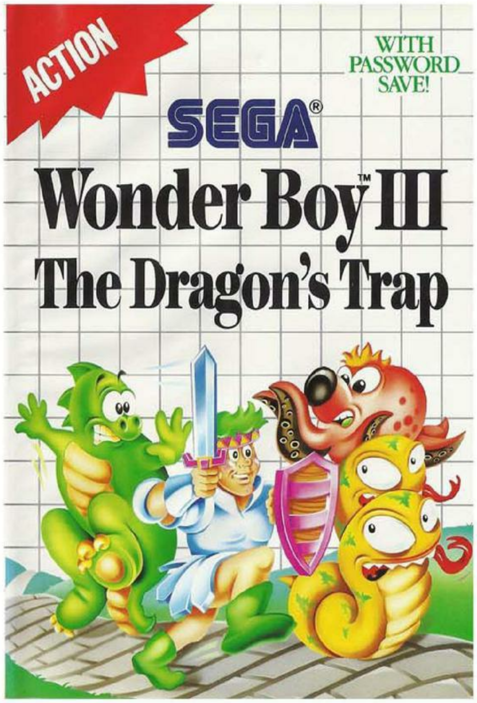
WONDER BOY 3: THE DRAGON'S TRAP

Release Date: 1989
Developer: West One
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - RPG
Players: 1

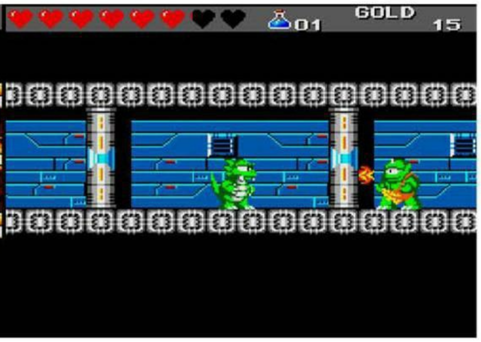

WONDER
BOY
III
PUSH START BUTTON

This is without a doubt one of the best Master System games, and frankly one of the best games of all time.


ACTION
WITH PASSWORD SAVE!
SEGA®
Wonder Boy™ III
The Dragon's Trap

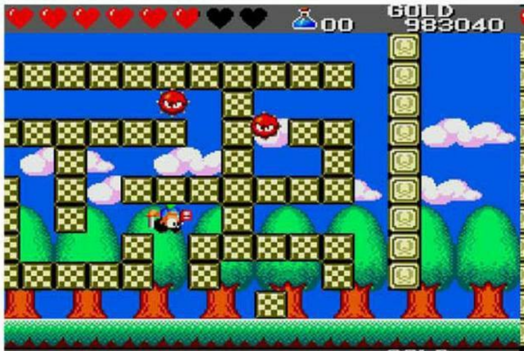
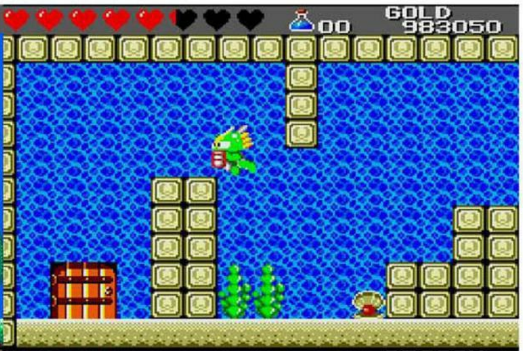
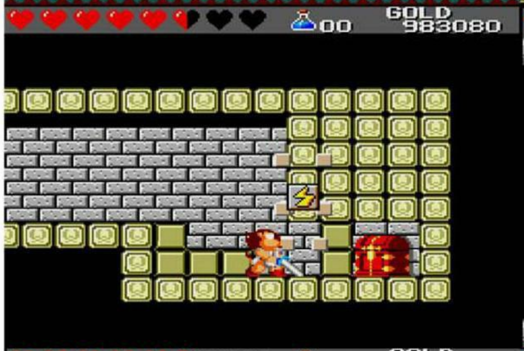
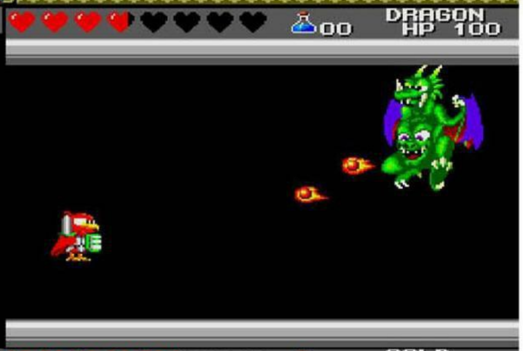
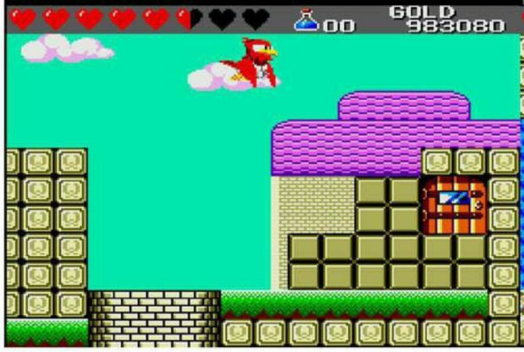
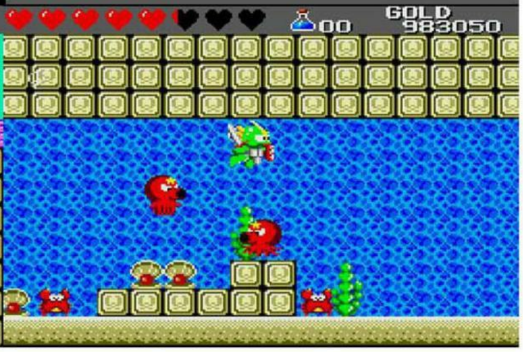
If this had been put out on a system with a larger user base (i.e. Nintendo, Genesis) then this would be on virtually every "best of" list out there. Sadly though it remains one of the best games that very few people have played. The game picks up right where the second installment left off, even giving you the opportunity to defeat the last boss all over again. Once you relieve the glory of victory you are turned into a dragon and must escape the castle before it is destroyed. Only then does your true adventure begin. And wow, what an adventure it is.

The gameplay is a healthy mix of side scrolling action and Metroid type exploration. During your travels you will see areas and treasure chests that you will be unable to reach. Unlike Metroid however, you don't reach them by tracking down a specific item, rather you must defeat a massive dragon boss that will allow you to transform into a character with a specific trait. All told there are six different forms you can take, and each have their own unique traits and abilities that open another portion of the world to you. Not just in the sense that you can now reach the next dungeon to face off against another boss, but also allows you to reach some of the aforementioned treasure chests.



01
DRAGON
HP 60

Wonder Boy 3: The Dragon's Trap

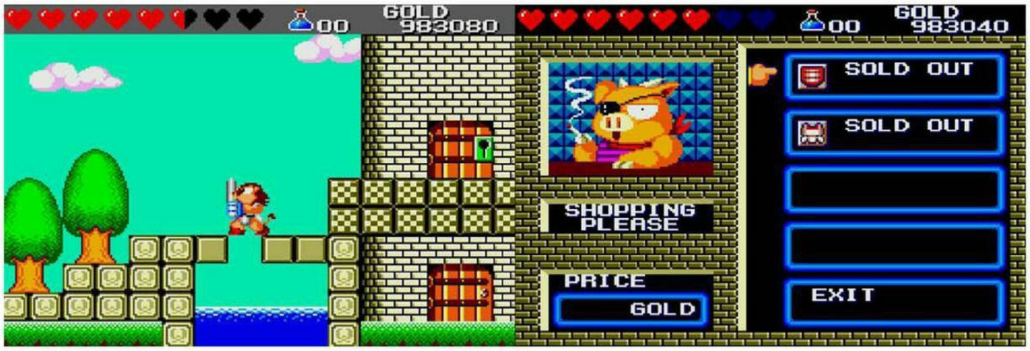

00
GOLD
983040

00
GOLD
983050

00
GOLD
983080

00
DRAGON
HP 100

00
GOLD
983080

00
GOLD
983050

There is your Human form which is pretty standard. The Lizard-Man form turns you into a fire breathing lizard, and again nothing special. Mouse-Man is about a quarter of the height of the other characters and has the ability to stick to special blocks, which means he can walk on walls and ceilings. Piranha-Man is water friendly and can swim, as well as leap out of the water. Hawk-Man is the winged form and grants you the ability to fly. And finally there is Lion-Man is not only the strongest form, but he swings his sword in an arc which allows him to hit things above his head. For the first portion of the game you will be stuck in certain forms until you defeat the next dragon, however there are platforms that will allow you to choose what form you want.

01
GOLD
15
00
GOLD
983040

There is also a light RPG presence here. While you don't gain levels, you do collect money that can be spent to upgrade your armor and weapons, as well as purchase magic and healing potions. In order to get some of the better items you will have to do some light grinding, but it's nothing too major. You can also increase your health capacity and find special one-use weapons to help you survive your journey. Thankfully like any long winding adventure, there is a password system here so you don't have to do everything in one sitting.

Everything about this game is fantastic, from the music to the graphics to the controls and the gameplay. If you are a fan of the genre, or frankly just a fan of video games in general, you must play this game.


00
GOLD
983080
00
GOLD
983040
SOLD OUT
SOLD OUT
SHOPPING PLEASE
PRICE
GOLD
EXIT

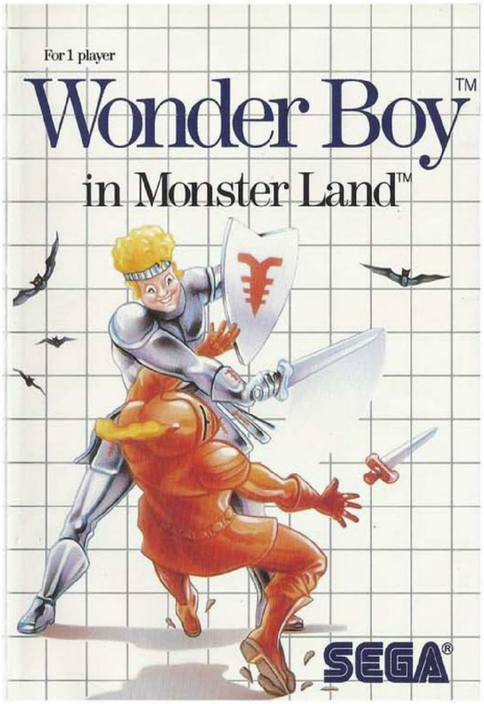
WONDER BOY IN MONSTER LAND

Release Date: 1988
Developer: West One
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1

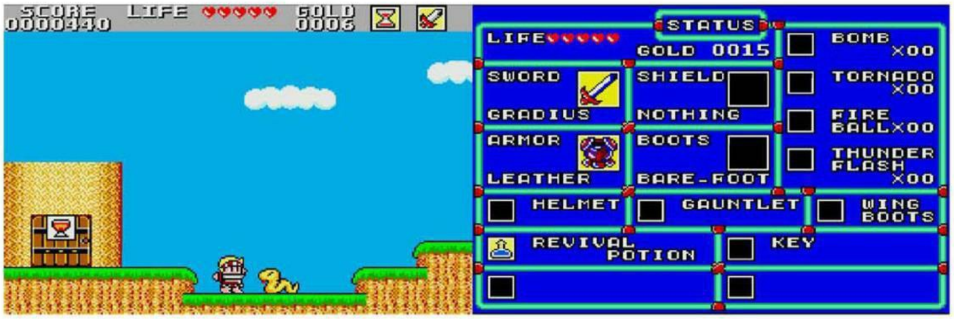
WONDER BOY
IN
MONSTER LAND
PUSH START BUTTON

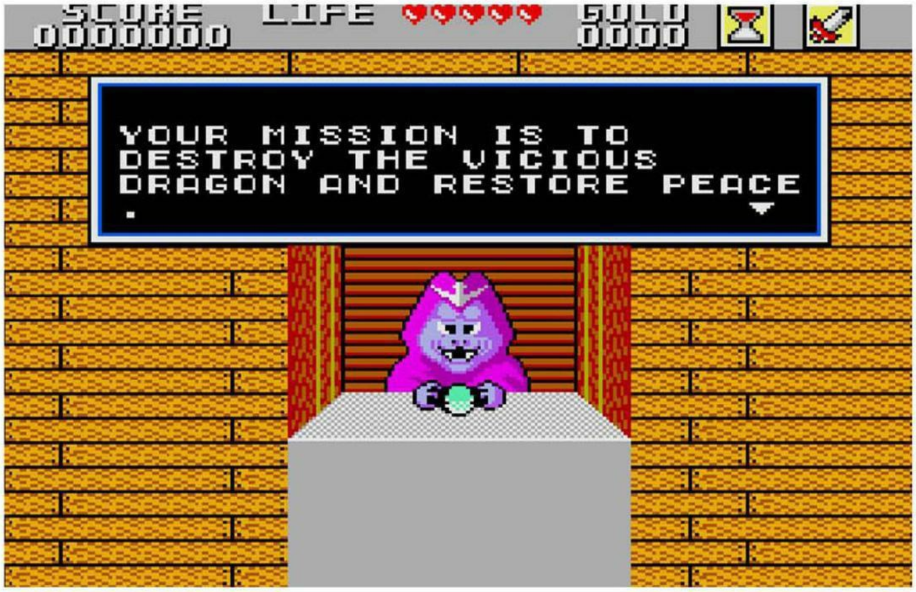
While this is a vast improvement over the original Wonder Boy, it is still a far cry from the pinnacle third entry in the series.


For 1 player
Wonder Boy™
in Monster Land™
SEGA®

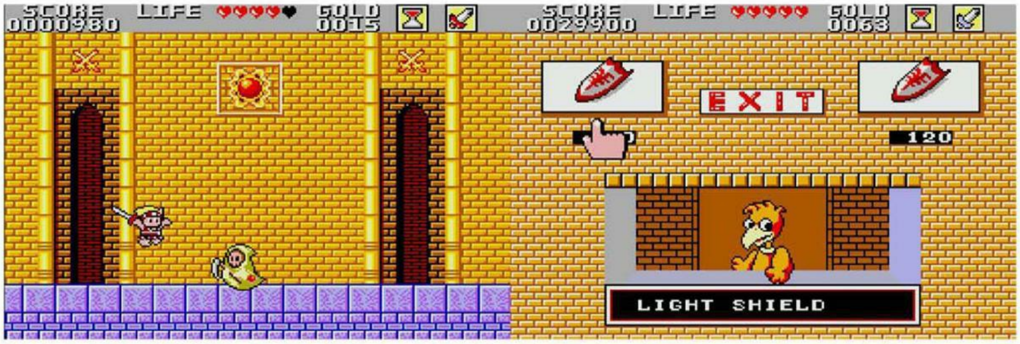
Gone are the stone axes and skateboards and in are a healthy dose of swordplay. Now instead of simply jumping over the majority of enemies you get to hack them to death and then loot their bodies. OK, you don't exactly loot them, but they do throw money into the air as their last act.

The money is useful because there are a ton of shops to spend it in. You can upgrade everything from your sword to armor to even your boots, all of which will make your life much easier as you travel through the enemy infested levels. And there are plenty of enemies standing between you and your goal, ranging from snakes to arrow shooting tribesmen to sentient mushrooms. Most of the enemies take a hit or two to dispatch.


SCORE 0000440
LIFE
GOLD 0006
STATUS
LIFE
GOLD 0015
BOMB ×00
SWORD
SHIELD
TORNADO ×00
GRADIUS
NOTHING
FIRE BALL×00
ARMOR
BOOTS
THUNDER FLASH ×00
LEATHER
BARE-FOOT
HELMET
GAUNTLET
WING BOOTS
REVIVAL POTION
KEY

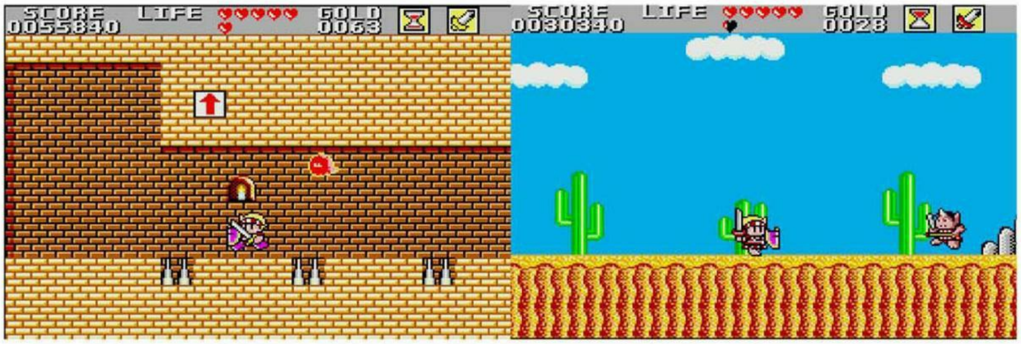

SCORE 0000000
LIFE
GOLD 0000

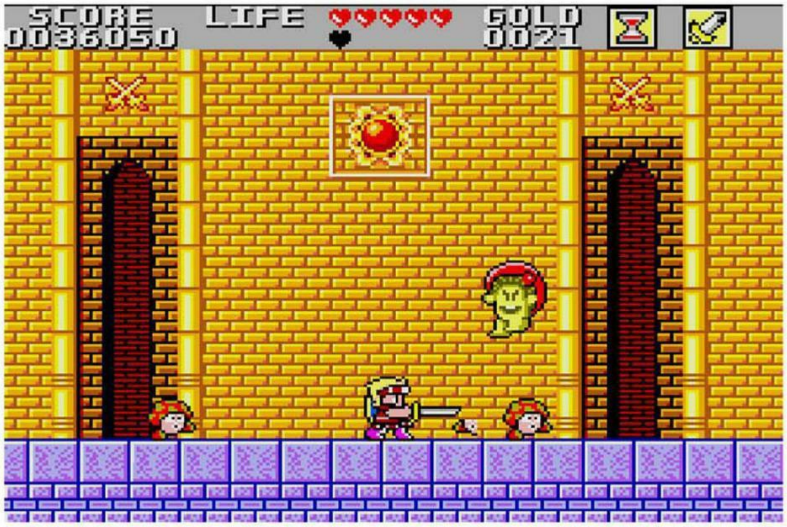
YOUR MISSION IS TO
DESTROY THE VICIOUS
DRAGON AND RESTORE PEACE
.


SCORE 0000980
LIFE
GOLD 0015
SCORE 0029900
LIFE
GOLD 0063
EXIT
120
LIGHT SHIELD

The levels are pretty straightforward in that you go from point A to point B, kill a few enemies, make a few difficult jumps, and finally face off with a boss that just happens to have a key to the locked door preventing you from going to the next level.

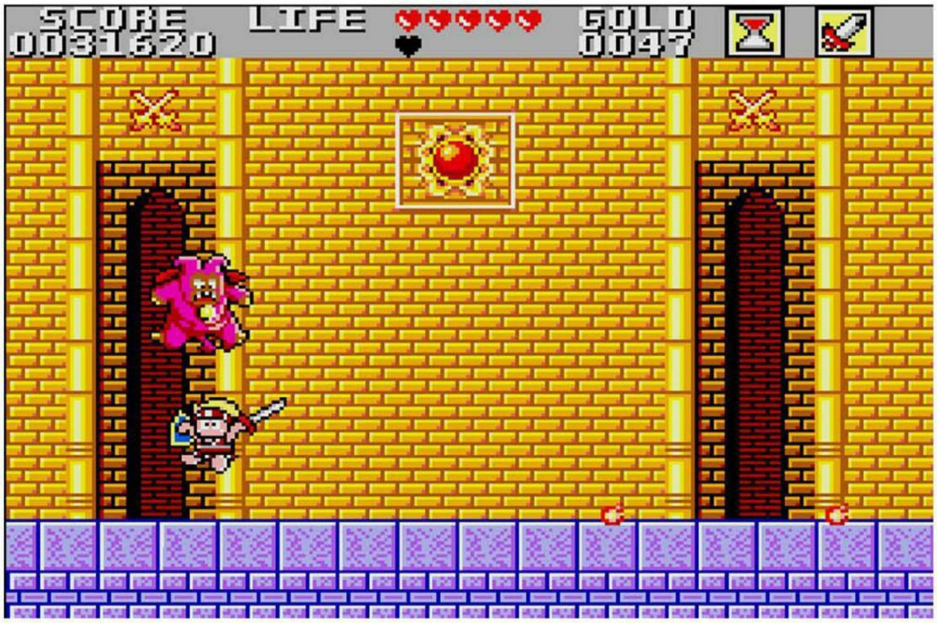
(Side note, why is it whenever there is a locked door preventing the hero from progressing forward there is always a boss holding a key? If I ever become a supervillain (god willing) I'm going to have locked doors at the end of every single level, but am going to give the bosses guarding those doors bogus keys. So unless the hero happens to be a locksmith I should be OK.)


SCORE 0055840
LIFE
GOLD 0063
SCORE 0030340
LIFE
GOLD 0028


SCORE
0036050
LIFE
GOLD
0021

Even though the levels are straightforward the gameplay is very solid. Enemies are plentiful, there aren't any cheap deaths, and the constant upgrade of equipment gives you a sense of progression. The graphics are a bit on the primitive side, but it can be overlooked given how good the rest of the game is.

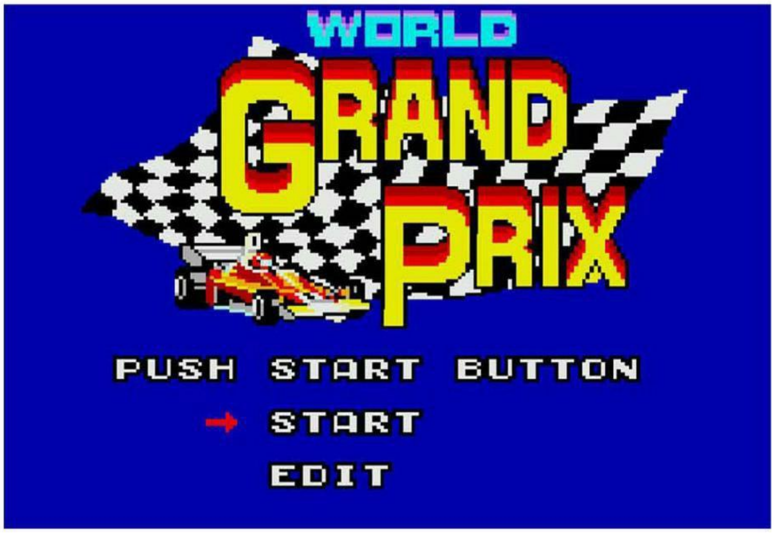
If you are a fan of the genre or want to play the lead in to one of the best games ever, then give it a shot because you'll have fun with it.


SCORE
0031620
LIFE
GOLD
0047

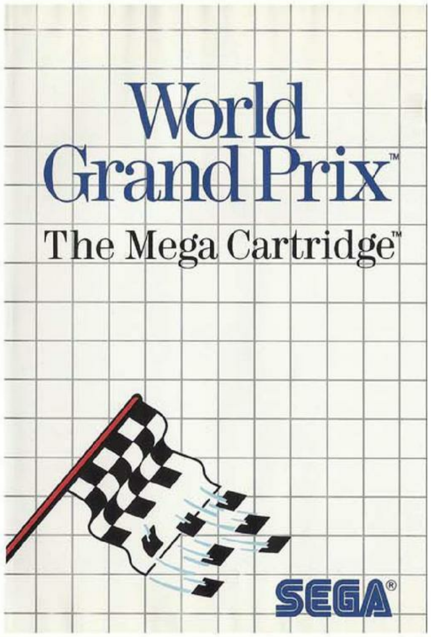
WORLD GRAND PRIX

Release Date: 1986
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Racing
Players: 1

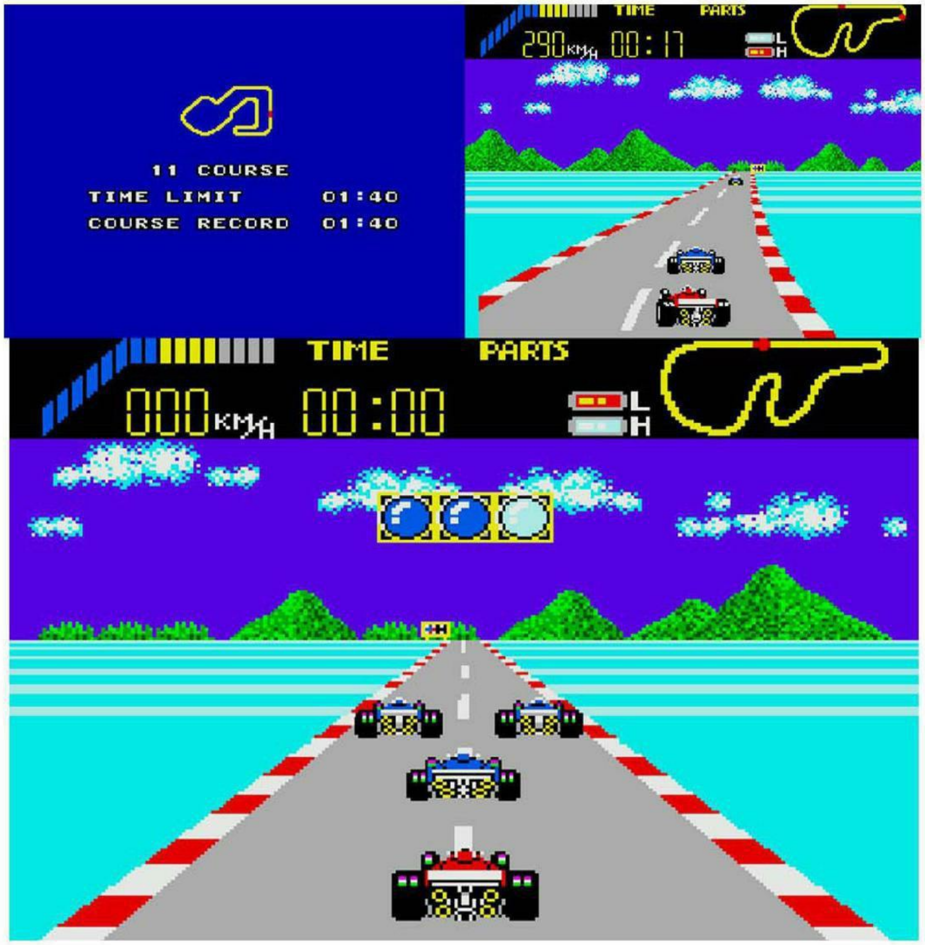

WORLD
GRAND
PRIX
PUSH START BUTTON
START
EDIT

This is basically a jazzed up version of the Atari classic Pole Position.

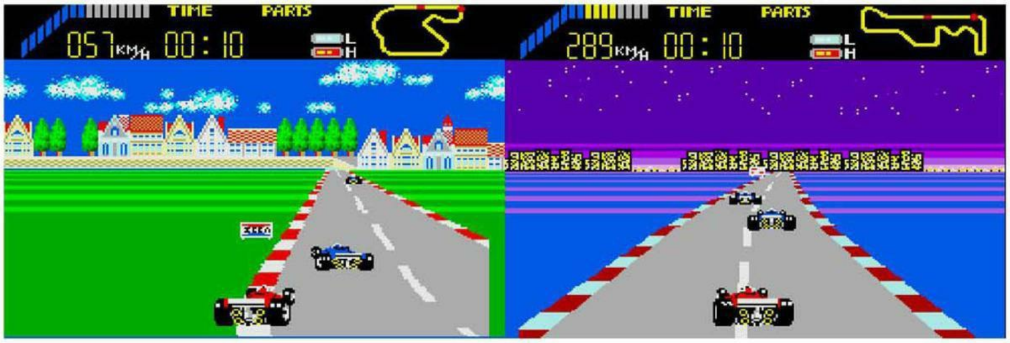

World Grand Prix™
The Mega Cartridge™
SEGA®

You drive an open wheeled car around a dozen race tracks while trying to cross the finish line under the time limit. Unlike a lot of racing games though, you only get one trip around the track. Oh, and there are no places, just you against the clock. Well, you and a ton of other maniacs against the clock.

Making it to the finish line in the allotted time is made more difficult by the fact that your car will blow up at even the slightest touch from an opponents car, and the fact that the other drivers in the race are reincarnated Kamikaze pilots who think it's a good idea to cut off a driver going nearly 300 miles per hour. There are ways to avoid a fiery death, either by having cat like reflexes to dart out of the way at the last possible second, or by slamming on the brakes and hope that you decelerate enough that it doesn't kill you.

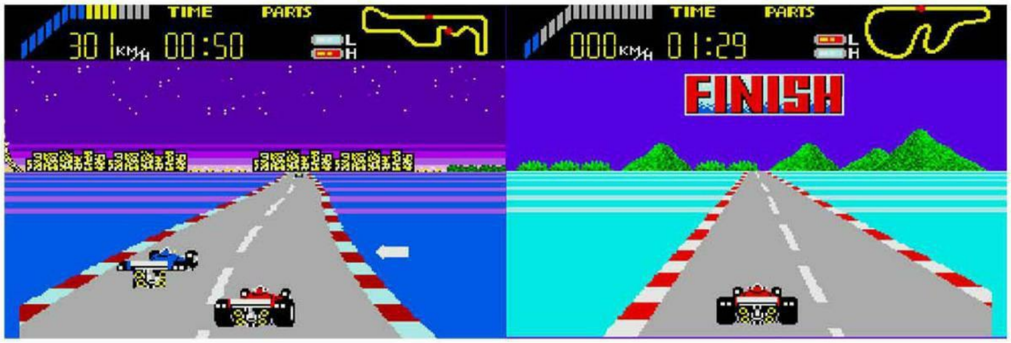

11 COURSE
TIME LIMIT 01:40
COURSE RECORD 01:40
TIME
PARTS
290KM/H
00:17
L
H
TIME
PARTS
000KM/H
00:00
L
H

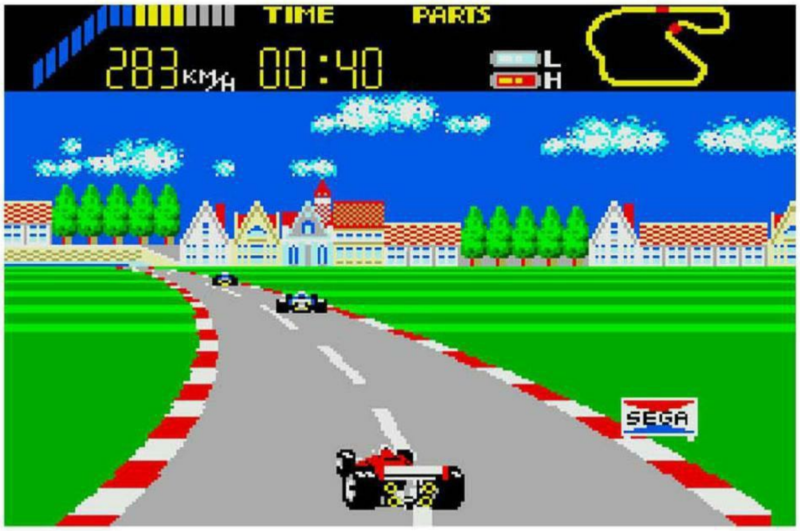
WORLD GRAND PRIX


TIME
PARTS
057 KM/H 00:10
L
H
TIME
PARTS
289 KM/H 00:10
L
H

Of course slamming on the brakes puts a damper on your ability to finish the race by your deadline. More often than not however is you will have to hit the reset button after the third explosion because it is mathematically impossible for you to get a good enough time to move on.

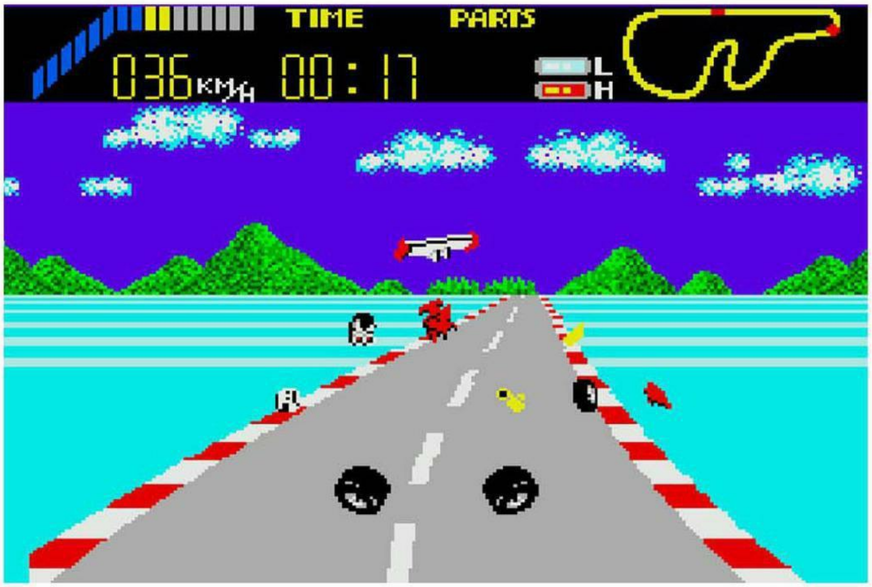
If you are somehow lucky enough to finish a race you will be rewarded with points. If you barely finish the race in time you'll get ten whole points, but the faster you are the more you get. Once you have acquired at least a hundred points you can begin to upgrade your car. Granted there are just a handful of things you can do, like increase the acceleration, but it's a nice touch.


TIME
PARTS
301 KM/H 00:50
L
H
TIME
PARTS
000 KM/H 01:29
L
H
FINISH


TIME
PARTS
283KM/H
00:40
L
H
SEGA

Given how your car starts out however you will be lucky to earn a hundred points in your first four or five races, and by that point you'll more than likely have been disqualified for being too slow.

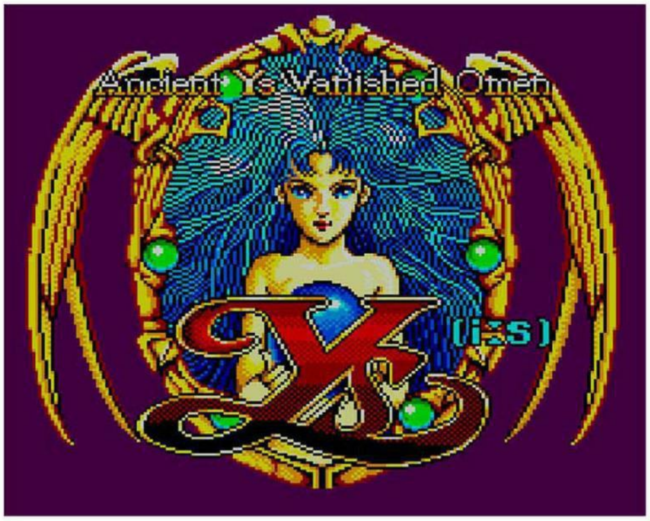
World Grand Prix is a slightly more robust throwback to the simple racing games that dotted the arcade landscapes in the beginning days. If you are looking for something solid that you can pick up and play for twenty minutes or so, this isn't a bad way to go.


TIME
PARTS
036KM/H
00:17
L
H

Y'S THE VANISHED OMENS

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Nihon Falcom
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - RPG
Players: 1

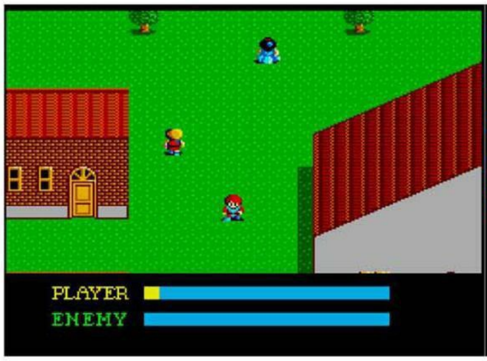

Ancient Ys Vanished Omen
Ys
(i:S)

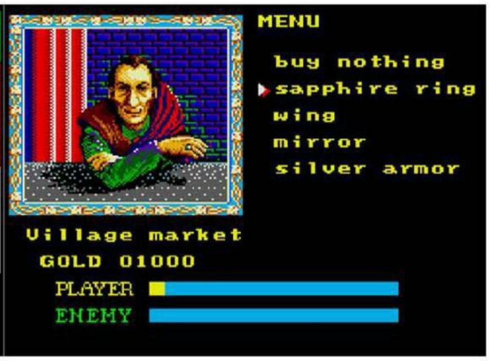
This is about as basic an action RPG as you can get.

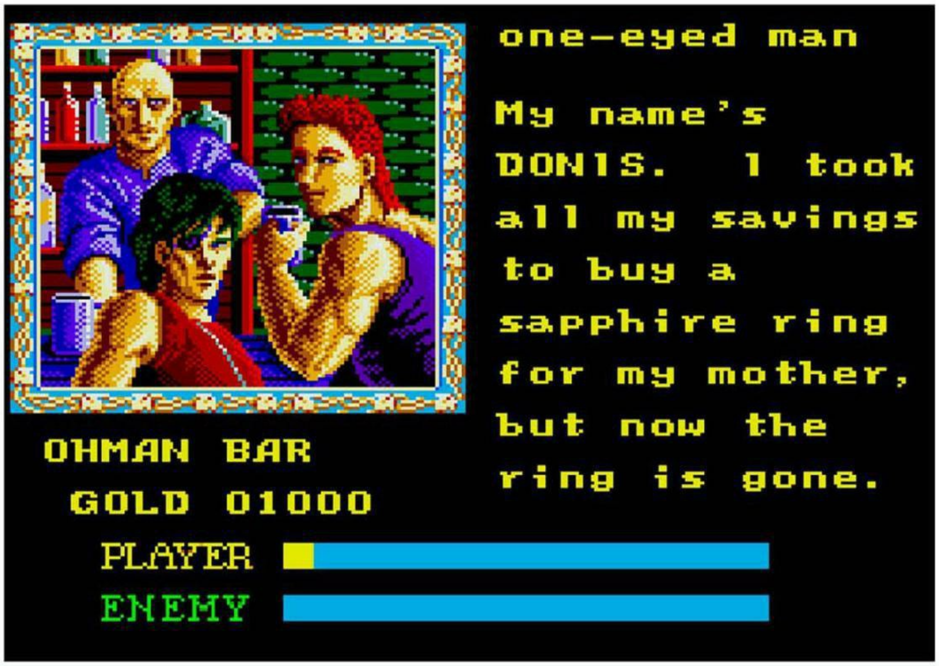
ADVENTURE ROLE-PLAYING
SEGA®
Ys
The Vanished Omens

You control a young adventurer who sets out into the world to make a name for himself. In order to do this he must travel to towns, defeat all sorts of exotic monsters, and delve deep into dungeons. Oh yeah, and do the usual RPG stuff like collecting gold to upgrade equipment, gaining experience to go up in level, and so forth.

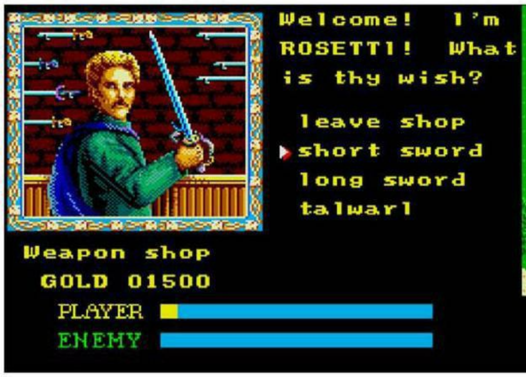
The only thing that is unique about the game is that it has the absolute worst fighting system in the history of games. Seriously, why did anybody think it was a good idea to have the hero attack by ramming into the enemy?


PLAYER
ENEMY


MENU
buy nothing
sapphire ring
wing
mirror
silver armor
Village market
GOLD 01000
PLAYER
ENEMY


one-eyed man

My name's DONIS. I took all my savings to buy a sapphire ring for my mother, but now the ring is gone.
OHMAN BAR
GOLD 01000
PLAYER
ENEMY

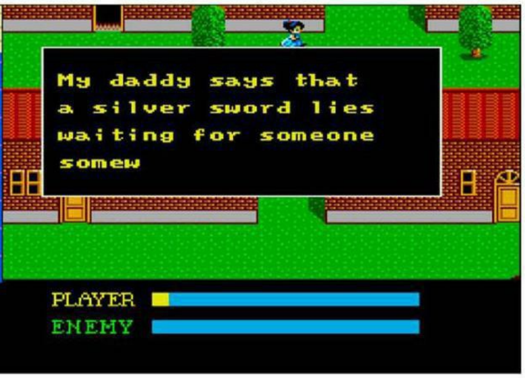


Welcome! I'm ROSETTI! What is thy wish?

leave shop
▸short sword
long sword
talwarl
Weapon shop
GOLD 01500
PLAYER
ENEMY

PLAYER
ENEMY

PLAYER
ENEMY

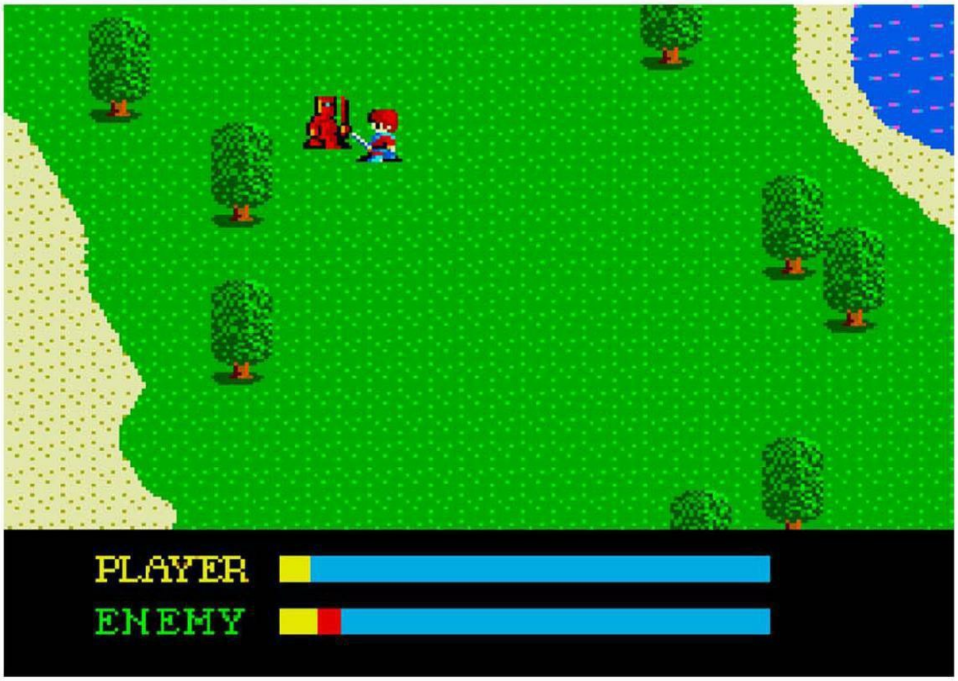


My daddy says that a silver sword lies waiting for someone somew

PLAYER
ENEMY

There is no attack button, none. The only way to defeat enemies is to run at them and slam into them, but wait, you can't run head on into them or else you'll be killed.

The only way to land a blow is to do a dance around them until you can come at them from an angle and hit them on their side. Now if the Master System had analog controllers then it wouldn't be a big deal, but since you are essentially moving on a grid thanks to the D-pad, it quickly becomes an exercise in tedium and frustration. Granted the battles might get a little easier once you have properly upgraded your equipment and get the feel of it, but it's a brutal learning curve that will turn off a lot of gamers.



There are some simple quests to undertake, like hanging out with the drunks at the local bar and learning about a stolen sapphire ring, then purchasing said ring from the local low life merchant and returning it to the rightful owner for a small reward.

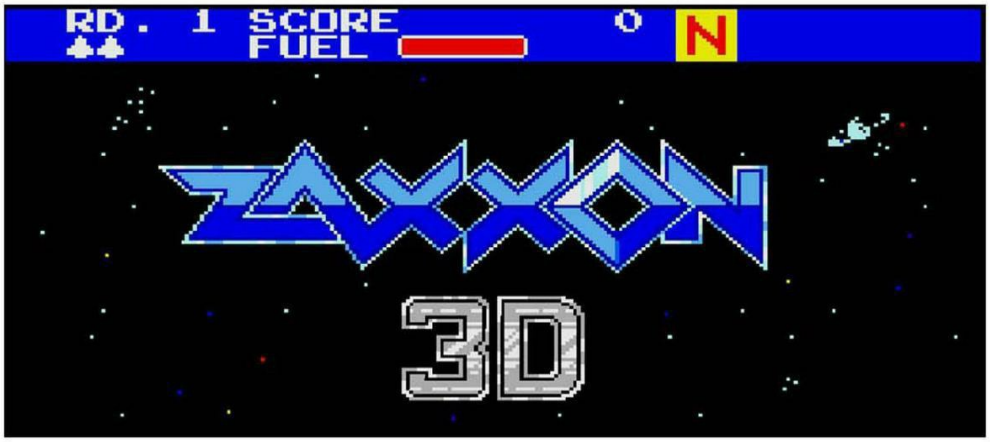
Incidentally if you want to trigger the main quest without having to grind through a ton of enemies to purchase enough equipment to satisfy the quest givers prerequisites, you'll have to figure this out before buying any weapons or armor.

The graphics and the music are pretty good for an 8-Bit title, but the thing that really holds it back is the poor attack system. Sadly though, if you really want to play an action RPG title on the Master System this is one of your very limited options.

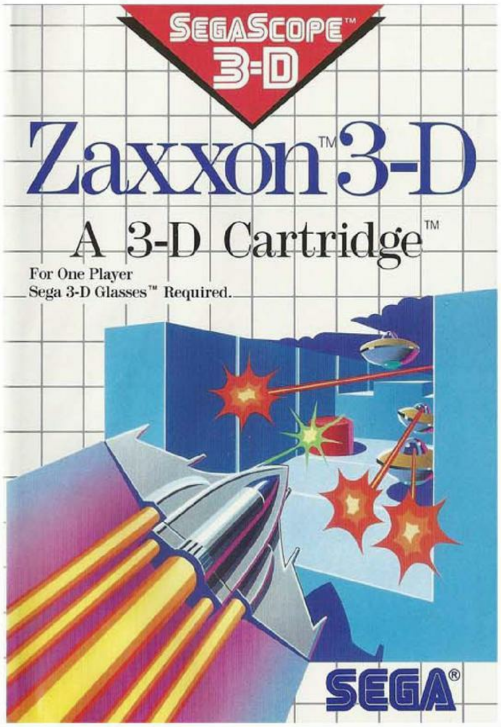
ZAXXON 3-D

Release Date: 1991
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1

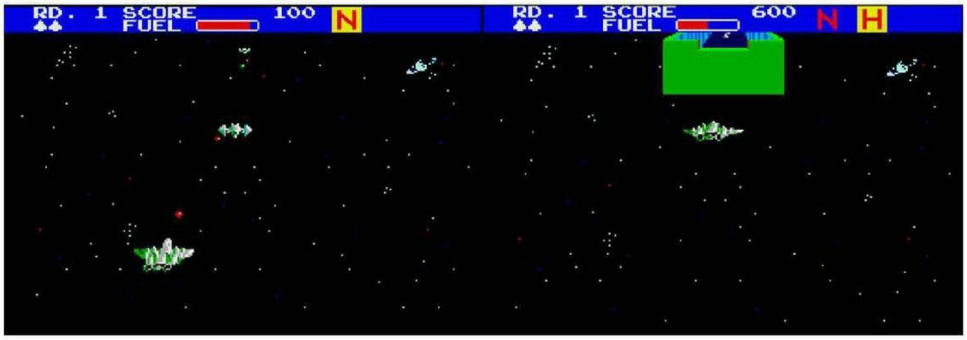

RD. 1 SCORE 0
FUEL
N
ZAXXON
3D

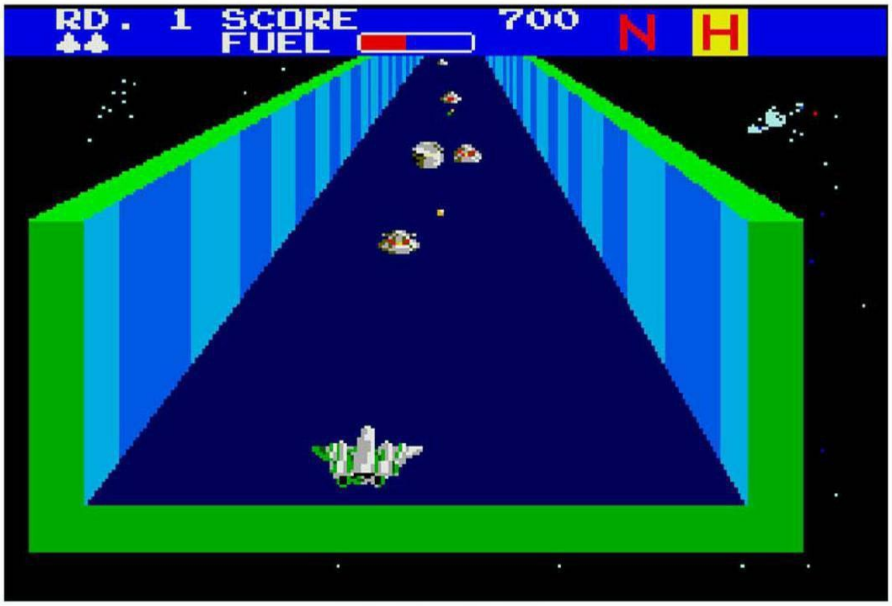
This is an update of sorts to the classic arcade game.


SEGASCOPE™
3-D
Zaxxon™ 3-D
A 3-D Cartridge™
For One Player
Sega 3-D Glasses™ Required.
SEGA®

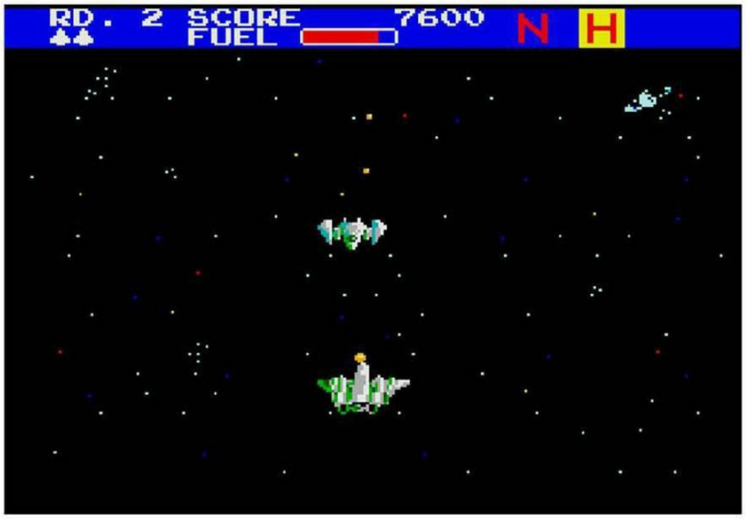
Instead of preserving the things that the arcade game did right, they took the general concept of a ship flying through a pseudo 3-D base, changed the perspective, and pretty much ruined the game.

The original was played in a top down/isometric 3-D view, which gave you a great idea of where everything was. In the Master System version however the perspective has been changed to a third person view where you are looking at the back of your ship. As a result enemies are virtually impossible to hit since you never know what level they are on.


RD. 1 SCORE 100 N
FUEL
RD. 1 SCORE 600 N H
FUEL

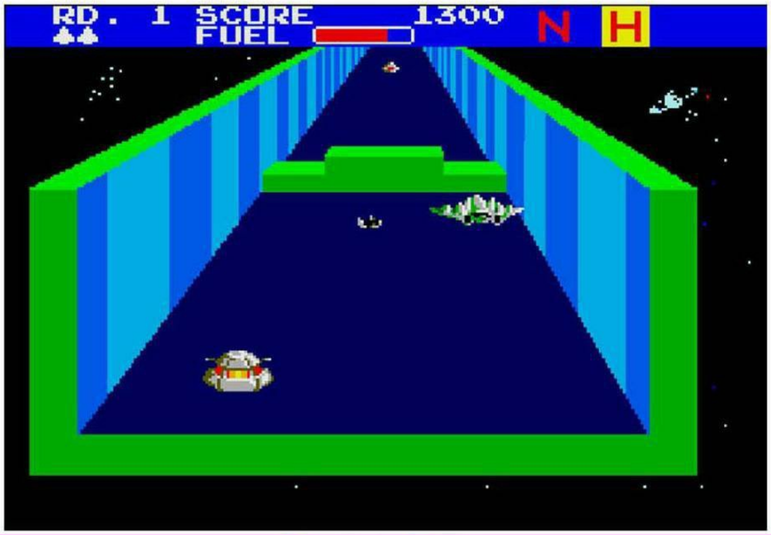

RD. 1 SCORE 700 N H
FUEL

Zaxxon 3-D



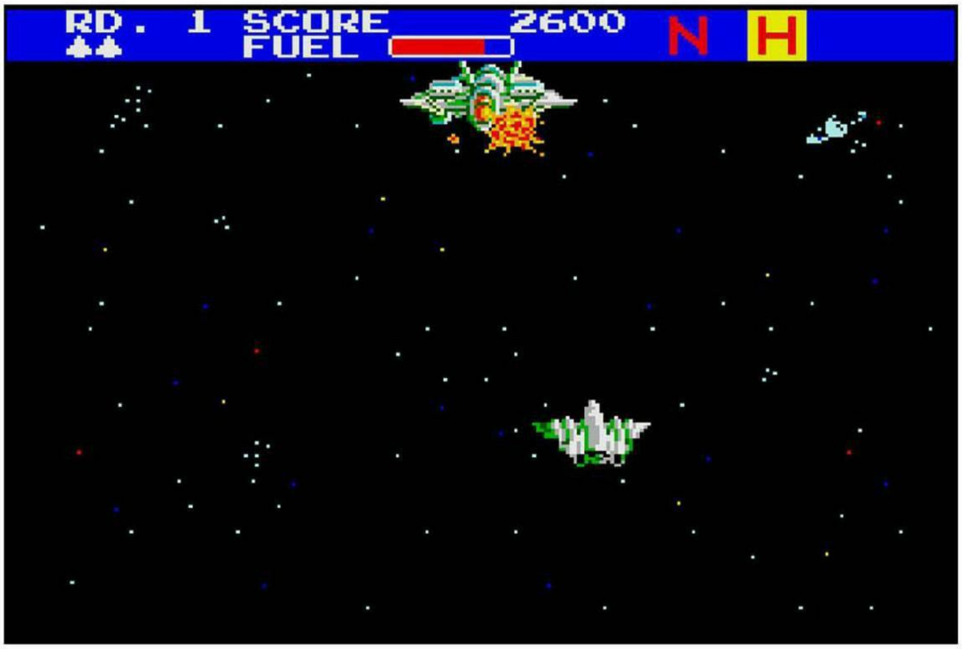
Plus once you add in the fact that every shot you take drains your fuel, surviving for very long isn't that great of a prospect. Of course you can replenish your fuel by destroying enemy ships, which leads to a vicious circle since you have to shoot a few dozen times in order to hit anything because it's virtually impossible to aim in order to get enough fuel to survive.

The levels play out in three parts. The first is a dogfight where you face off against several waves of enemy ships, which as I mentioned before are kinda hard to hit. The second has you flying through the base that was made famous in the original, and the final portion has you facing off against a boss.



All three segments are short and rather dull, with the dogfight being impossible and the later two being way too easy. Once you are in the base all you have to do is hug the ground while firing and you can hit anything and everything. And on of the off chance someone gets off a shot at you just raise your elevation slightly and you'll be just fine. The bosses are nothing more than a larger than average ship, and they take a handful of shots to destroy.

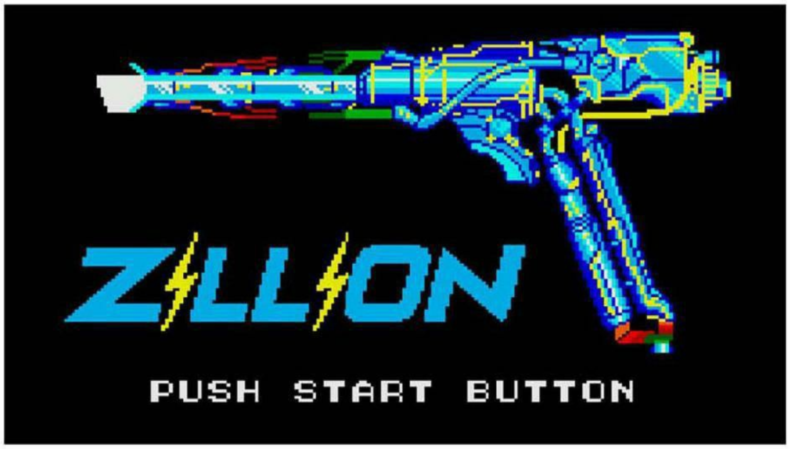
Thanks to the difficulty in hitting anything, this is one of the weaker games in the genre. For those without the 3-D glasses who want to give this a shot, there is an option to turn it to 2-D, although I wouldn't recommend it no matter how many dimensions you play it in.

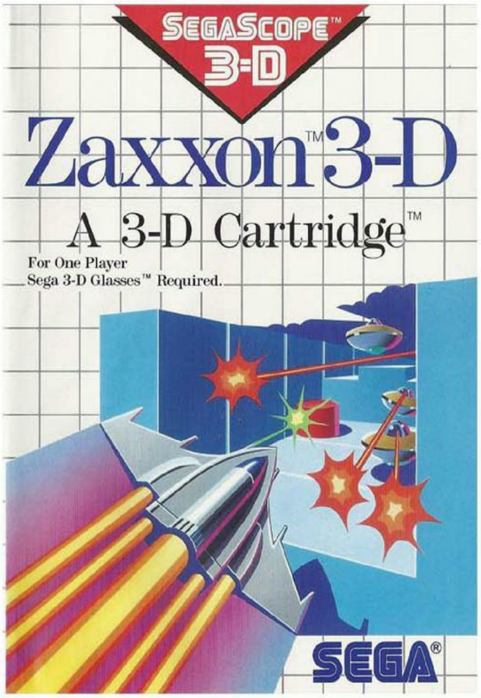


ZILLION

Release Date: 1987t
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1

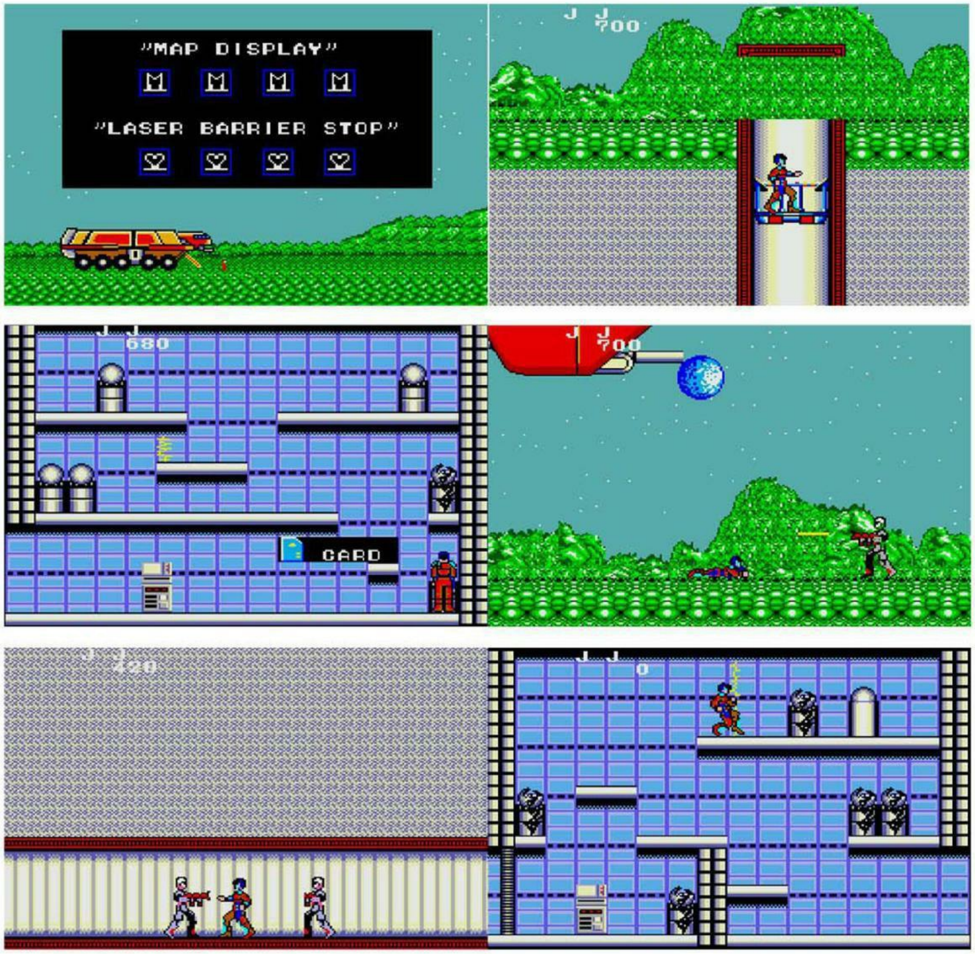

ZILLION
PUSH START BUTTON

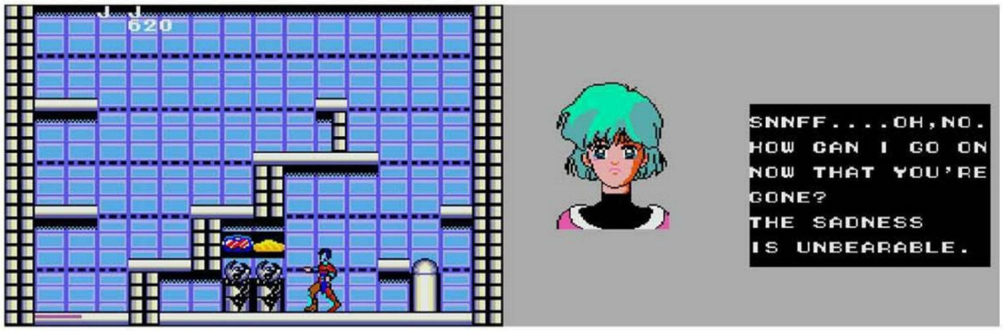

SEGASCOPE™
3-D
Zaxxon™ 3-D
A 3-D Cartridge™
For One Player
Sega 3-D Glasses™ Required.
SEGA®

This is hands down one of the best games on the Master System.

You control a futuristic agent who must infiltrate an enemy base to find five floppy discs with sensitive information, rescue your two friends, and set the base up for self destruction. While not as deep as the Nintendo classic Metroid, there is a lot of exploration to be done on this relatively large world.

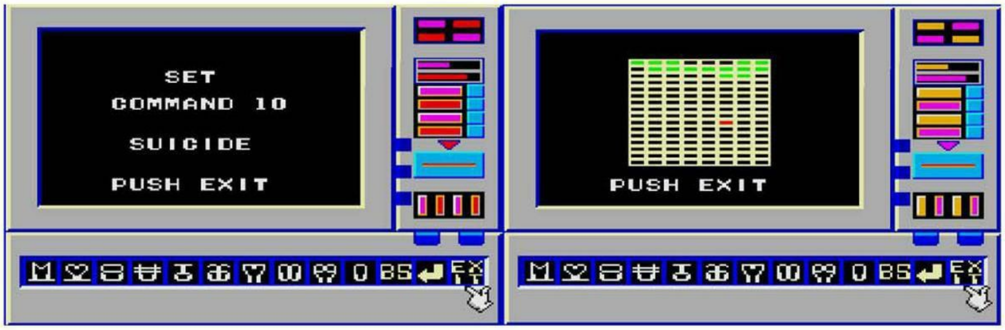
The gameplay is pretty standard in that you run, jump and shoot your way to victory. What sets Zillion apart however is the fact that you have to use strategy to move forward and achieve your mission. Along the way you will enter into rooms with computer terminals and various storage bins. By shooting the bins you can acquire ID cards that will let you do a multitude of things like shutting off laser barriers or opening doors.





SNNFF....OH,NO.
HOW CAN I GO ON
NOW THAT YOU'RE
GONE?
THE SADNESS
IS UNBEARABLE.

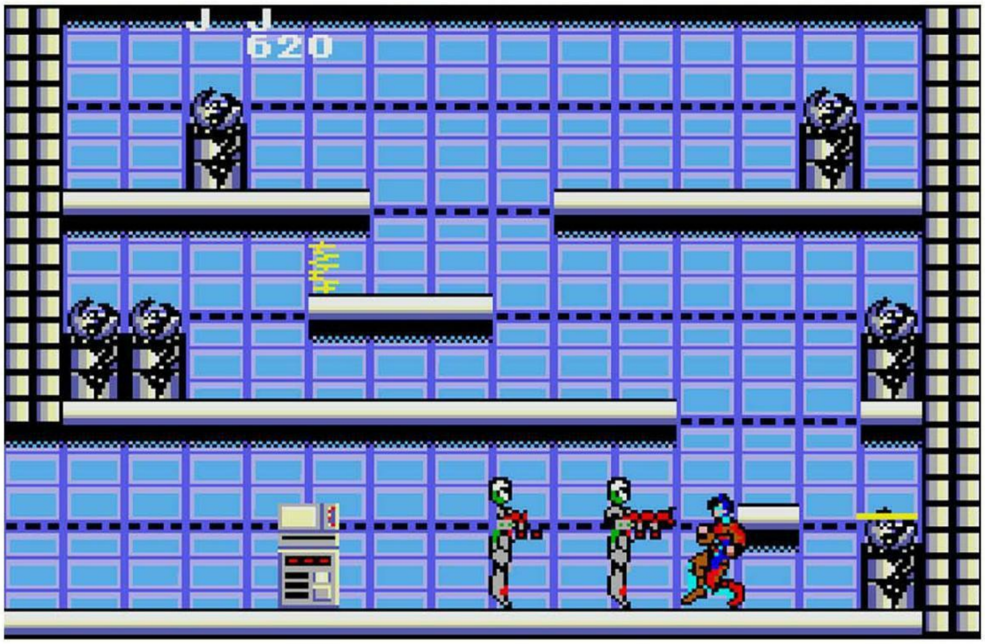
The laser barriers can be shut down by using a series of preordained codes that are given to you at the start of the mission, however the doors must be open via a unique code that is found in each room. Because they are oddly shaped symbols rather than letters (and because there is no way to store them in game) it will be vital to have a pen and paper handy to jot down the info you get from the bins. Once the door is open it's time to move on to a different room.


SET
COMMAND 10
SUICIDE
PUSH EXIT

PUSH EXIT

There are also other items you can get in your journey, such as more powerful guns and scopes that will help you avoid hidden beams that will alert the guards to your presence. Of course if you do alert them it's not the end of the world since they are easily dispatched. In face for at least the first part of the game you can spend most of the battle crawling around on your stomach and shooting their shins since they never think to knee down to take a shot. Eventually they do learn to shoot in places other than chest high, but the crawling tactic is still a good one.

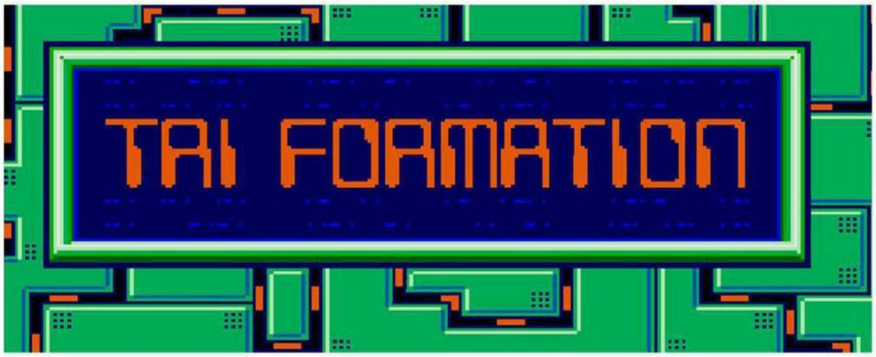
Despite being one of the earlier Master System games, Zillion is surprisingly deep and still holds up fairly well today.



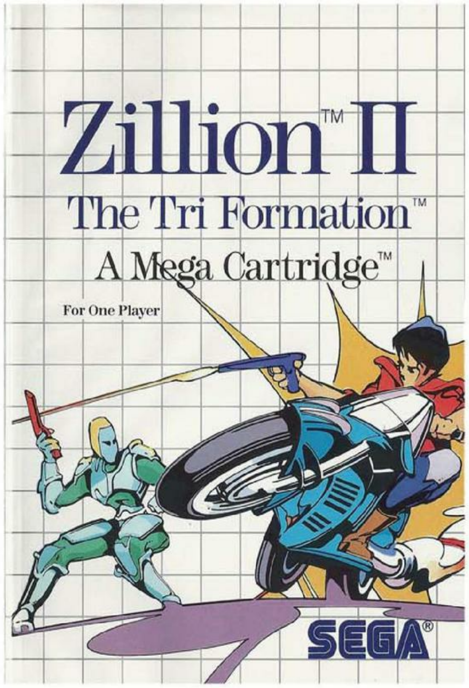
ZILLION 2: THE TRI FORMATION

Release Date: 1988
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega

Genre: Action - Platforming
Players: 1

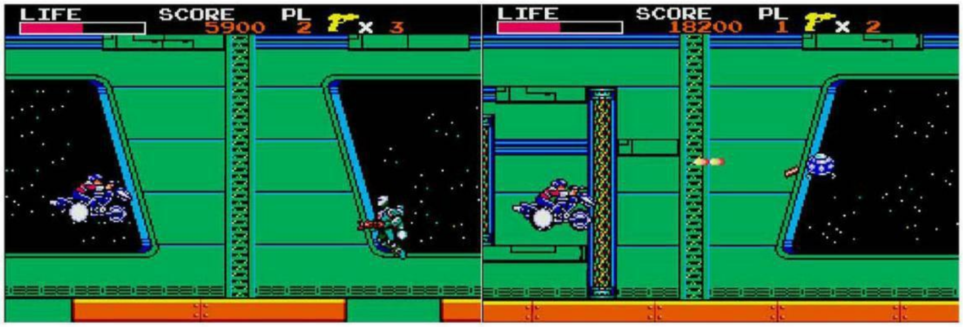

TRI FORMATION

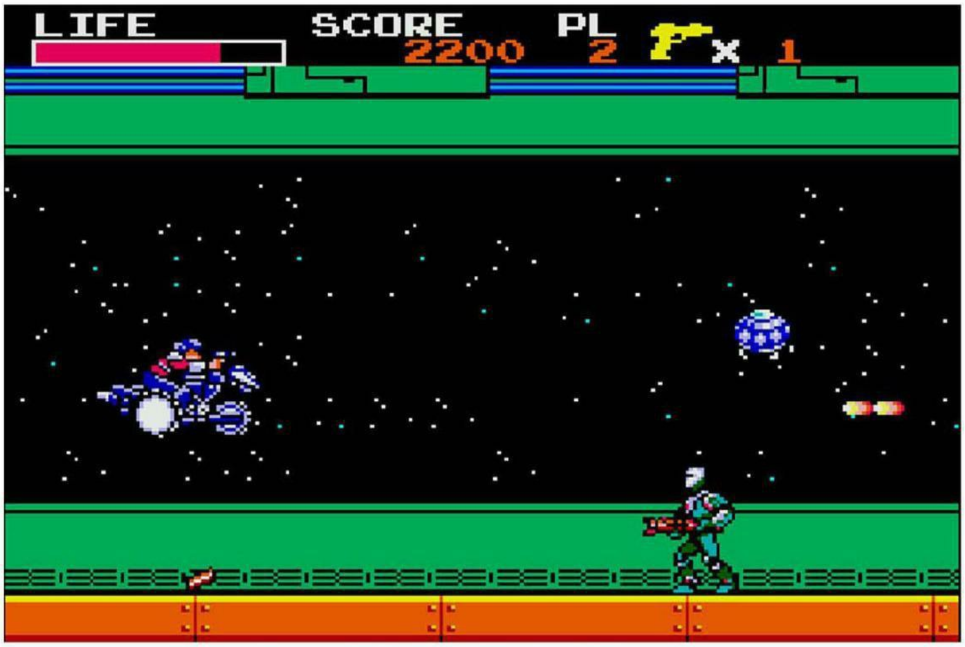
This is a textbook example on how to destroy a franchise.


Zillion™ II
The Tri Formation™
A Mega Cartridge™
For One Player
SEGA®

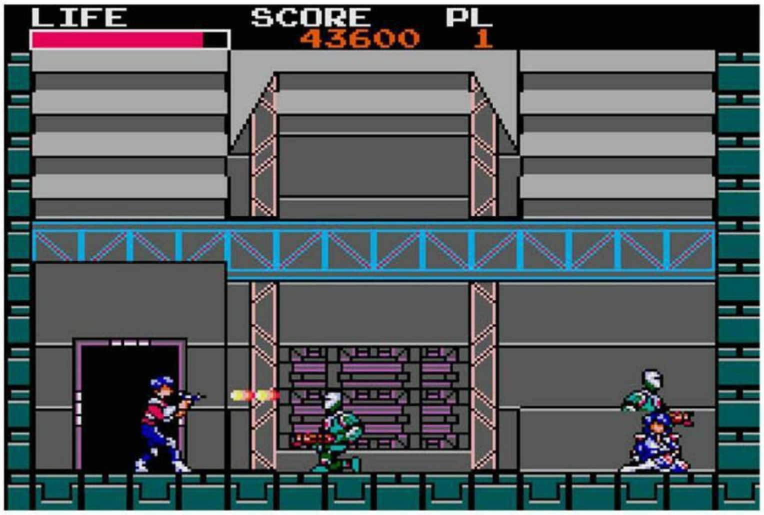
The original was a solid action platformer that has a healthy dose of exploration, and frankly was one of the better games of the era. So what do they decide to do for a follow up? Well they remove all of the exploration and replace it with generic and incredibly boring side scrolling action levels. Oh yeah, and you get to ride a motorcycle half the time.

While the first game was a relatively deep and rewarding gaming experience, the sequel is as shallow as it gets. The motorcycle levels are nothing more than timed button pressing events since the enemies all come out in pretty much the same order.



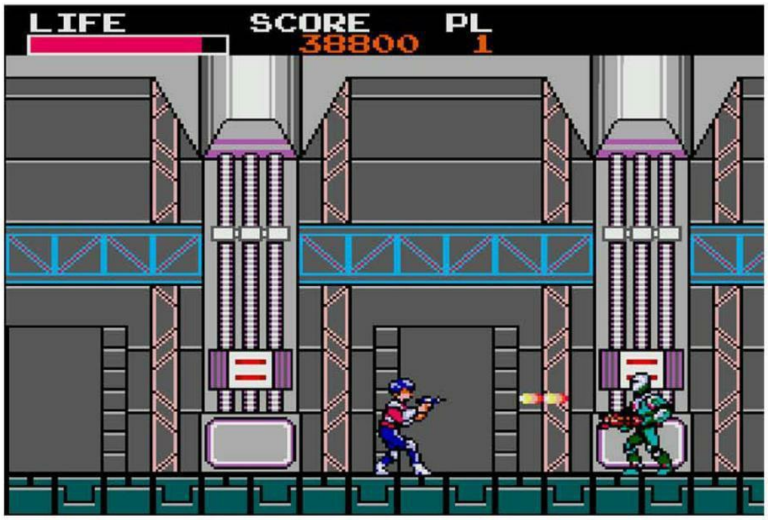


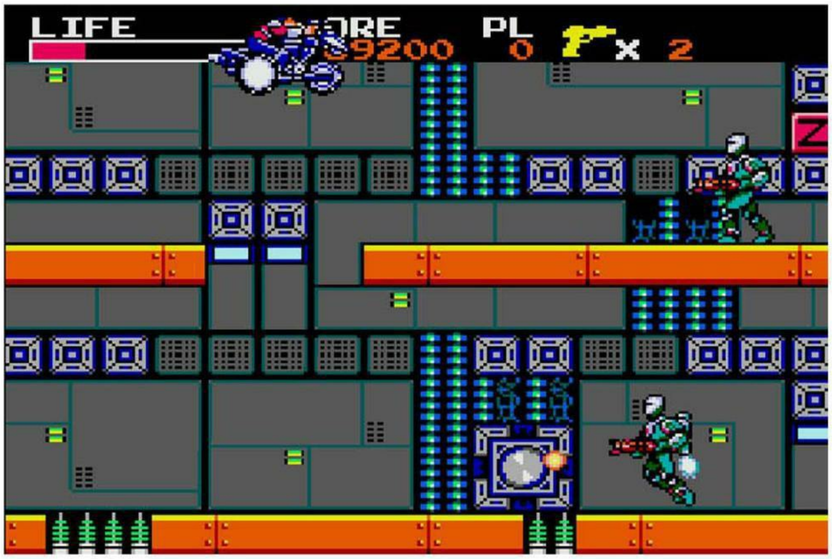
Zillion 2: The Tri Formation



Since your bike moves at a constant pace it wouldn't surprise me in the least if someone memorized the enemy placements and could play through the levels blindfolded. Granted that would involve them playing the game for longer than fifteen minutes, which I suspect anyone who bought this thinking it was another fantastic adventure like the original would be hard pressed to do.

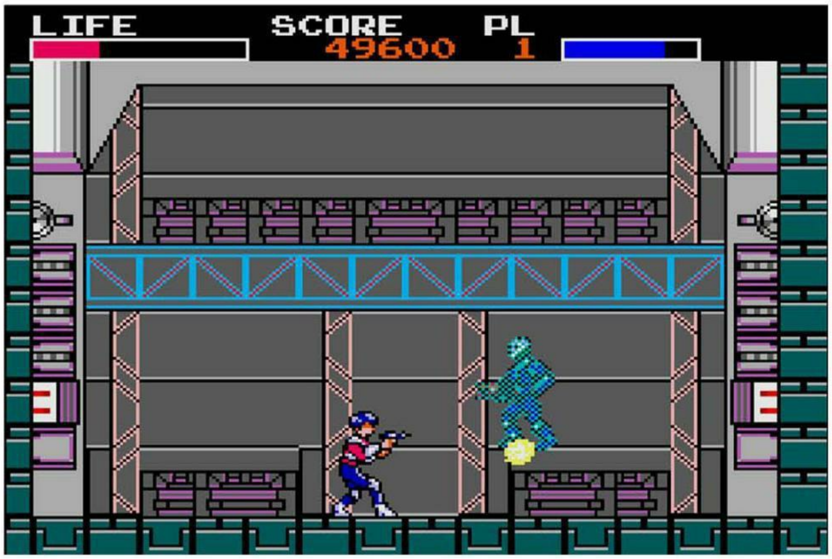
Between the motorcycle levels you are on foot. Sadly the gameplay doesn't really change that much as you just run in one direction and fire indiscriminately at anything that moves. OK, occasionally you get to climb ladders and ride on elevators, but for the most part it's completely linear.





It can be challenging at times, but that has more to do with the fact that you are a huge character that also doubles as a bullet magnet. You do have a fairly long life bar, but after a few bullets to the chest you'll quickly see it dwindle.

If you have any questions as to just how bad this game is in comparison to the original, just think that this was the last game in the series. Seriously, it killed the franchise. Which is a shame because given a chance this franchise could have been Sega's answer to Metroid.



ZILLION 2: THE TRI FORMATION